

Wild

Australia's Wilderness Adventure Magazine



An epic walk through the Chewings Range
Trekking Amnye Machen | The Australian Eight
Track Notes: **Macalister Spur** and **Tropical Day Walks**
Pack survey | The Great Dividing Trail



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Departments

7 From the Editor

Uluru: to climb or not to climb?

9 Wildfire

Letters to the Editor

12 Info

Mike Wood profile, mountain running roundup and more

17 The Wild Life

Quentin Chester comes down to earth in the Gammon Ranges

40 Folio

Southern Scapes: Michael Walters photographs Tasmania's beautiful places

45 Track Notes

Catherine Lawson outlines five top tropical day walks in Far North Queensland

50 Track Notes

Glenn van der Knijff takes us on a four-day circuit that follows the Macalister and Son of a Bitch Spurs in the Victorian Alps

55 All Things Great and Small

Pigs might fly but echidnas do swim

57 Green Pages

A profile of Wild's Environmentalist of the Year, Cam Walker; updates on red gum forests, Tasmania, the Kimberley and much, much more

63 Gear Survey

Mathew Farrell surveys packs for bushwalking

69 Equipment

A new water filtration bottle, an innovative pack, a luxurious sleeping mat and more, as well as a camping classic in From the Billy

73 Reviews

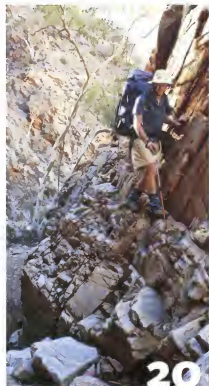
A new book from Bob Brown and more

78 Wild Shot

A pedicurist's delight



Features



20 A Walk Through the Chewings

Glenn Tempest explores the Chewings Range on an epic three-week trip

26 The Australian Eight

Steve Waters bags the highest peak in each state and territory

31 Amnye Machen: a sacred trek

Michael Stephens follows an ancient pilgrimage route through north-eastern Tibet

36 Crossing the Divide

Warwick Sprawson searches for riches in the Great Dividing Range in Victoria

Wild

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WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



Cover Michael Hampton exploring a large cave in 45 Degree George, Chewings Range, West MacDonnell National Park, Northern Territory.
Glenn Tempest



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David Bristow

Uluru

To climb or not to climb?

IT'S FUNNY HOW MUCH FUSS CAN BE MADE over whether to climb a rock or not. Today, *The Age* tells me that our former angry rock star, Peter Garrett – now shiny suit and Federal Minister for the Environment – has decided that people can continue to climb to the summit of our most famous icon, despite calls for it to be banned. Obviously Peter and I have some kind of telepathic connection because I was already planning on adding my own pearls of wisdom to this debate. Either that, or it could be because one of our readers sent us a letter about the subject (see this Wildfire). Perhaps our reader and Peter have the psychic connection? But I digress.

It seems a bit funny, because most of us are born with the instinct to climb. We may have come down from the trees millennia ago, but I think there must be a small (and quite hairy) part of us that is always wanting to rescale the heights from which we came. Given that it is the most natural thing in the world, what is the problem with climbing Uluru?

It's that the Anangu, the traditional owners of Uluru, requests that people don't climb it. There are two main reasons: Uluru is sacred to the Anangu and the path to the top is of spiritual significance, traditionally only taken by a few Indigenous men on special occasions. The second reason is that as the traditional caretakers of Uluru, the

Anangu, feel responsible for any injuries or deaths that take place on the climb up (an estimated 35 people have died climbing Uluru over the years).

Because of the sacred nature of Uluru to the Anangu, many argue that just as you wouldn't rock up and climb the Louvre Pyramid or the Wailing Wall, Uluru should be treated with the same respect.

Personally – and as someone who has devoted a lot of time to rockclimbing – I wouldn't climb Uluru. The reason is pretty simple, I believe it is a matter of cultural courtesy. Just as you wouldn't find me running around in my size 12s in a synagogue or at prayer time in a mosque, I will never climb Uluru.

With more than 200 years of cultural imperialism under our belts, we can find plenty of reasons to climb Uluru, from the fact that it's not man-made (perhaps a strange argument to use against a hunter-gatherer culture) to the idea that Uluru belongs to everyone (it actually doesn't, it belongs to the Anangu and is leased back to the Government), to other reasons that verge on, or fall into, outright racism.

However, this doesn't necessarily mean that I think climbing Uluru should be banned, although perhaps if I had any spiritual beliefs I would feel differently. The world is increasingly full of restrictions: to a certain

extent I believe people should be free to make up their own minds about whether they want to climb any object, be it man-made or not. As a climber, to me the act of climbing is not in itself sacrilegious, although it can be dangerous. It is people's reaction to a climb that determines whether it is offensive. This makes it a matter of respect (or fear if the consequences are drastic). Do you respect these people and their beliefs enough not to climb? While you might be tempted to scramble up the Wailing Wall, your respect for Judaism will probably stop you – that, and a healthy fear of being torn apart. I would say that the tradition of climbing Uluru stems from a time when Indigenous culture was not respected or taken seriously. If we choose to respect the Anangu's traditional culture, then we will not climb Uluru. Just as when I see a nice Catholic church (despite my atheism) I don't set off up its façade.

In the past, Uluru was referred to as Ayers Rock, some people still use this name. The traditional name was ignored in favour of a western sobriquet. This was acceptable while we could marginalise and ignore Indigenous culture, but as we have become (hopefully) more enlightened, we have learned to respect Indigenous people and their place in the landscape. In the future, I have no doubt that our attitude will change towards the climb itself and that one day it will be banned.

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In the meantime, as people become more educated, less people are choosing to climb Uluru. With the right education I am sure that eventually very few people will choose to climb it. From what I understand, many people – particularly tourists from overseas – arrive with the expectation of climbing the 'Rock', so when they find out that the Anangu prefer them not to, it comes as a complete surprise. Through education it is possible to change tourists' expectations before they arrive.

While I am not particularly in favour of banning the climbing of Uluru, what would be nice to see is the removal of the safety fence, not only is it ugly, but it would mean that climbing Uluru would require a new level of commitment, automatically reducing the numbers who choose to climb it.

Interestingly, during my research for this editorial, I discovered that the Anangu are not the only indigenous people who don't want people climbing sites that are sacred to them. In Wyoming, in the good ol' US of A, a natural formation known commonly as the Devils Tower is sacred to local Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne and Kiowa who have asked for climbing to be banned – they see it as a desecration for people to climb what is a place of spiritual significance. As such, there is a voluntary ban during the month of June, an important time of the year for ceremonies.

Apparently 80 per cent of climbers respect this ban. In this context though, there is no indigenous tradition of climbing the Devils Tower or of it being restricted to certain tribal members. Perhaps the call for a ban stems more from a desire for indigenous sites to be treated with the same respect as sites of western spiritual importance. While I can understand this, given the history of Indigenous dispossession in the US, I don't think it is a sound reason to stop people from climbing a natural formation – but I say this as a climber.

In New Zealand too, the Maori tribe local to Aoraki/Mt Cook request that climbers don't stand on the very summit, as in their culture the mountain is seen as a man and standing on his head is disrespectful.

Given some of the problems besetting Indigenous Australians, quibbling over whether to climb Uluru or not can seem petty, but in some ways the large numbers of people who continue to climb Uluru are emblematic of a historic unfairness that has led to many of the problems Indigenous communities now suffer. Maybe one day no one will climb Uluru and maybe one day Indigenous Australians will live long and healthy lives like the majority of Australians.

Ross Taylor

editorial@wild.com.au

Ferals and fires

More feedback on the 'Green Issue'

SIEGFRIED SLAGOWSKI ASKS FOR FACTUAL and unbiased reporting but offers exactly the opposite (*Wild* no 115). Here's a few facts:

- The Game and Feral Animal Control Bill does allow for hunting native animals in national parks.
- The Game Council (which supervises 'conservation hunting' in NSW) has cost NSW taxpayers over \$9 million in six years.
- The Game Council's own data shows an average of 6554 feral animals shot per year, nearly half of them rabbits. This is less than one animal per day per hunter, at a cost of \$287 per rabbit. So the claimed kill of 570 000 animals would take 87 years and cost over \$163 million.
- Research shows that you need to kill at least half the population every year to control feral animals. Shooting a few pigs or a trophy deer is twiddling at the margins.
- Official helicopter shooting programs in national parks often destroy 500 and more goats or pigs per day.
- Of the 218 feral deer herds identified in Australia in 2000, more than half most likely originated from dumped deer. The Game Council has opposed the listing of feral deer as pests. Pigs have been seeded into Weddin Mountains, Wollemi and other national parks.
- Research-based baiting programs minimise non-target kills through careful dosage and bait placement.
- Wollemi is a stronghold for threatened wildlife, including powerful owls, koalas, yellow-bellied gliders, tiger quolls, broad-headed snakes and regent honeyeaters. Fox and dog baiting has been successfully used to protect brush-tailed rock wallaby colonies.

The claim that poisoning is indiscriminate and has 'wiped out all the animals' in Wollemi is nonsense. So-called 'conservation hunting' has big costs, no conservation benefit and zero credibility. Shooters may be happy in their ignorance, but that doesn't give them the right to target national parks against the wishes of the New South Wales' community.

Ian Brown
Mount Victoria, New South Wales

I REFER TO THE ARTICLE 'HUNTERS AND THE hunted' written by Andrew Cox (*Wild* no 114). Andrew seems to be happy to employ untruths to push a case. Is his argument so devoid of merit that he must do so?

- Native fauna are not the targets of shooters under the proposals contained within the bill. Under the proposals shooters are obliged to obey the conditions contained in a permit issued specifically for each proposed shoot.
- The balance of power held by the Shooters Party happens to be democracy at work.

Perhaps Andrew's diatribe demonstrates his frustration that many Australians see the Greens as naive, irrational and ineffective. Don't the Greens and other political parties play politics?

- The Game Council is not 'discredited', it may not be perfect but it does provide an organised format that attempts to do its part in destroying feral animals. The Game Council and land managers take the view every little bit counts.
 - The function of the so-called Invasive Species Council (ISC) is not as independent or clear as their title suggests and some people wonder why that body isn't more supportive of the Game Council's aims and objectives. What does the ISC do?
 - Feral animals can be partly controlled by various 'integrated programs' but not fully. Calicivirus is now losing its potency. Shooting is immediate, selective and economical. Return visits to measure effects are unnecessary.
 - There are insufficient numbers of professional shooters. 'R' License shooters are highly competent hunting and target category marksmen and women.
- The 'large coalition of environmental and animal welfare groups uniting to stop the proposal' should support the Game Council and land managers and do something positive about feral animals. Any fool can hand out leaflets in Martins Place or email politicians. That doesn't stop the destruction of our precious and unique fauna.

Australia is losing the feral war. Andrew Cox,

the Australian Greens and the ISC should consult with the Game Council and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia to determine what practical work they can do to help win the war rather than demonstrate stupidity and ignorance, at which they seem remarkably adept.

Ray Atkin
Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

Fires in national parks

Congratulations on the excellent 'Green' issue of *Wild*. Bron Willis' exploration of the issue of campfires was especially welcome ('A question of campfires'). I enjoyed the ironic (surely?) inclusion of a photo of a walker lighting a fire in the Royal National Park in an article that clearly states that the campsite is a fuel stove only zone! (Track Notes, pages 44-47). Considering the damage done to biodiversity in this park by wildfires in the recent past, I would have thought that of all places a campfire here would be absolutely taboo. Apparently it's not.

Here in Central Australia there are similar problems getting a 'no fires' message through to stubborn bushwalkers. The Larapinta Trail has been a fuel stove only zone since its beginning but every season many dozens of fire pits appear along remote sections of the track. This is worrying because of the unique nature of the wildlife of the MacDonnell Ranges; many fire-sensitive species of plant and animal which have been eliminated



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elsewhere by wildfires are now restricted to the very gorges and desert woodlands where these campfires are being lit. A bushwalker's fire that gets out of control on the Larapinta could easily endanger or even extinguish a whole species (that is no exaggeration, there are several desert snail species out here which are restricted to tiny sites on the track and which could perish in a wildfire). Surely nobody's campfire is worth risking the extinction of a species? Needless to say, in desert conditions wood is slow growing and therefore easily depleted, some sites are now heavily impacted by firewood collection.

Park rangers and responsible guides waste a lot of time dismantling fire pits on the Larapinta in an attempt to discourage firestarters. I personally think that there should be enormous fines for anyone caught lighting fires for the reasons given above. Yes, it gets cold in the desert at night, but I would suggest that anyone who can't be bothered to prepare adequately for that shouldn't be going bushwalking in the first place.

Campfires have no place in national parks. Using these places is a privilege to be cherished. They need our help to be preserved for wildlife, for everyone, forever.

Mark Carter (Professional wildlife guide, former Larapinta Trail guide and park ranger)
Alice Springs, Northern Territory

We have received quite a few emails about the photo showing a camper with a fire at the North Ero campground in the Royal National Park, we certainly don't promote the flouting of national park rules and publishing the photo was an error of judgment. **Editor**

A new wilderness ethic

Congratulations to Wild. As an ex-advocator to Wild in the past I have been critical of Wild's published material and editorial comments. Yes, it is true that Wild has an underlying conservation ethic, but I feel much of its material has been lost in the mainstream view of providing information based of what it essentially thinks its readers want. Since the magazine's inception, I believe that Wild has fallen into a philosophical void of simply providing an explanatory divulgence of the earth's wild places rather than encourage a sensitive exploratory of the natural and/or personal experiences.

Martin Hawes article, Re-creating Consciousness ('Green Issue', Wild no 114), clearly provides us with an alternative and deeper spiritual view of the personal rewards of developing an affinity with those special places in our natural world.

I am not convinced that everyone will now want to relinquish his or her old ways and adopt such profound thinking. Yet the very essence of Martin's message is about connecting with nature and immersing oneself in awareness of the earth around you. Such mindfulness may require reading his article several times, and allowing moments to reflect on past experiences, or to subsequently contemplate a broader philosophy behind future journeys.

It is a bold and progressive step forward for Wild to publish such an article, which highlights the folly of 'man conquering nature, and the peak bagging ethics of the past'. Let's hope it encourages contributors and editorials to develop a more sensitive and enlightened approach to our precious wild places.

It has been a long time coming, but as they say 'better late than never'.

Well-done Wild!

Ted Mead
Hobart, Tasmania

Climbing Uluru

Congratulations on another great edition of Wild. The stories about challenges to various forest areas – Gippsland and the Florentine – and the mining in Arkaroola remind everyone that the fight is never over.

Could I comment though that I found Catherine Lawson's piece on Uluru ('Top Territory Day Walks', Wild no 115) a concern. The climb of Uluru is recognised as a highly controversial activity and more than just 'a decision that divides visitors'. To climb Uluru expressly defies the request of the Anangu people not to climb. The Anangu are the traditional owners and custodians of Uluru as well as the contemporary legal owners, working in a joint management role with the Commonwealth. What is it that stops us respecting the request, given that complying with that request is a mark of acknowledgement and respect of the Indigenous owners? Is that beyond us? Wouldn't a certain sign of that acknowledgement and respect be an author's clear position that Uluru should not be climbed?

To my mind elements in the walk description like 'walkers can...continue on to where a chain leads climbers to Uluru summit' and 'The climb follows a popular, albeit strenuous, two hour pathway that the Anangu people prefer visitors not to tackle' present a very compromised position on this issue. I was at Uluru walking earlier in the year and I think that writing that the Anangu request you do not climb is a much more accurate description of the situation. It is not like the Wild I know to present such a compromised position. I suggest an appropriate position would be to say 'Uluru should not be climbed as this would defy the request of the traditional Anangu owners'.

The walk around Uluru is a fantastic experience in itself, especially when coupled with guided cultural tour accompanied by an Anangu elder, which unfortunately didn't get a mention in the article.

Chris Grounds
Erowal Bay, New South Wales

See this issues editorial to see our thoughts on this one. **Editor**

PLBs, another option

I found the short article on Personal Locator Beacons on page 69 of Wild no 115 interesting. However, Peter Briggs did not mention one very useful satellite rescue device that is also

available to bushwalkers. The SPOT 2 satellite GPS messenger is cheaper and lighter than all the PLBs mentioned in the article. It costs about AU\$200, plus an annual subscription of about AU\$120. It weighs just 147 grams and fits comfortably in your hand. It is also more useful to a bushwalker than a PLB since you can use it to let your friends or family know where you are even if you don't require a rescue. You can press a button to have your current location (accurate to about 40 metres) emailed and/or sent by SMS to your contacts. The email message sent includes a link to a Google map where your contact can see your position. If you need help, a special button sends a message to an international rescue organization, which then relays your location to the relevant local rescue authority.

The SPOT 2 is not yet available in Australia, but you can order it over the internet and it works perfectly here. The original SPOT is available here already, but it is a bit larger.

Anthony Dunk
Gosford, New South Wales

Lightweight musings

I walked the Overland Track recently and it was very interesting to watch fellow walkers in the huts as they prepared their evening meals. I travel as light as I can and my kitchen kit was one spoon, one cup, one small billy and grippers. The billy lid is one of those thick aluminium foil pie dishes. I laughed at my companion who'd bought an extra bowl for his morning muesli, particularly as he didn't use it. Our food, mostly bought dehydrated food, apart from a few luxuries, was in light bags.

I was amazed to see people with multiple plates, bowls, billys, kettles and various other paraphernalia! They had cans, they had glass bottles! And all often stored in a thick, heavy, plastic container. The lightweight message is not getting through. I marvelled at their strength! They laboured for considerable lengths of time over complicated dishes and then had to clean up afterwards. We boiled water on our Pocket Rockets and were tucking in within 15 minutes.

It made me think. Our gas stoves are light and quick and gas is a preferred fuel for the eco-friendly. But we were left with a can to be recycled. Our store bought dehydrated food was light, quick and filling but left the bag for disposal. But, we used far less fuel and had no clean up, so we used less water and didn't pollute the bush.

One of my mantras when it comes to the environment is that no-one has clean hands. We all contribute to the destruction of the environment to a greater or a lesser extent simply by living. But you do the best you can. Everything is a compromise.

Keith Binns
Goulburn, NSW

Readers' letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to Wild, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, Vic 3205 or email editorial@wild.com.au

Mike Wood

Interview + Image: Chris Ord

Managing Director of Mountain Designs Western Australia, President of the Mundo Biddi Trail and Bibbulmun Track Foundations and Chair of the Water, Recreation, Sport and Tourism Alliance, Mike Wood is a busy man devoted to outdoor recreation. He's also a man who walks the talk. After joining the first descent expedition down the Sun Kosi River in Nepal, he went on to help establish adventure tourism in that country, and has since led innumerable expeditions in wilderness regions across the globe.

I got started bushwalking through the Scouts. The first time was in Wilsons Promontory. I carried a bunch of cans on my back with leather straps and an A-frame pack. It was pretty uncomfortable. I quickly figured out that you can get to the same wilderness areas with kayaks and you didn't have to carry the gear.

We used to build our own canoes – open Canadians – and paddle the Yarra, running the tunnel at Pound Bend. Then we got into closed top kayaking, doing stuff on the Snowy, the Thompson, the Mitta Mitta, the Mitchell... Victoria's high country is still one of my favourite places in the world.

The adrenaline rush of doing the rapids was what got me, but at the same time floating down a river in the middle of nowhere was pretty addictive – the scenery and the peace of it all.

We thought we were quite different [getting into the outdoors] and we revelled in that difference. In those days you became a hippie because you didn't want to do the same as everyone else. You grew your hair a bit longer and wore different clothes to accentuate the difference between you and the rest of society – for me the bush was part of that acculturation.

I got better at putting my boat where I wanted it to be in a rapid and competed in state and national slalom championships. Then I met a guy called John Wilde, a legend of paddling. Here was this guy talking about going to Nepal and paddling a river called the Sun Kosi in 1980. I booked a one-way ticket and didn't come back for a long time.

I left Nepal after six years' guiding, but I have gone back every year for 30 years now. It was the place where I managed to excel at what I did. It was cutting edge stuff – we were paddling rapids that had never been paddled before. Everything is big and technical: the rivers, the mountains, the wilderness. You can choose – you can be on a highly technical creek dropping fast or you can be on a big volume sea of a river.

We set up adventure companies in an industry that was fledgling. There were no rules. You thought of an idea and you went and did it. I helped set up rafting trips there.



Holly and Mike Wood on the Annapurna Circuit near Tal last year, on their way to the remote area trekking area called Naar Phu. Mike Wood collection

The expeditions and the things that happened on those trips were in a way my rite of passage. The Sun Kosi certainly was. I was 21 and put on this first descent of this massive river in the Himalaya that stretched for 300-odd kilometres. I had to step up to the plate and be an adult. When that finished I was left on my own. That's when I became a proper group leader and guide. That's also when I fully understood the implications, that the responsibility really did rest on your shoulders and that if you messed around you really could kill people. It was particularly obvious on the Himalayan rivers. When things went wrong they went badly wrong.

I did have a couple of deaths – not of clients but of staff. In case in particular, I had to dispose of the body, cremate him, deal with the clients, the police and the family when I got back. It was pretty confronting. But there are no options, you just do what you have to do, it's your job and your role as a human being in the world. You can't walk away from that stuff and most of the time it won't let you.

I have a saying: always leave the party when you're having fun. That's where I was at when I left Nepal. I'd done what I was there to do – trained up a local rafting crew to run the operation. I thought it was time to move back to Australia to start earning money and buy a house and start a family. I think those things are important. So that's what I did.

Most people assume that I found it difficult to make the transition from living a life of freedom and adventure in Nepal to the good old suburban life in Perth. But I found it quite easy. A lot of the things I learned through

the guiding and what happened in Nepal prepared me for being a single dad. It prepared me for that journey.

We need to give our children the opportunities to take part in the wilderness world. As a society we tend to prevent that from happening through our whole concept of risk management – mollycoddling kids. I like my kids to try new things. It's also important that I don't force them to follow my way of life. I give them the taste, if they enjoy it and it's part of their personality, then well and good. Part of the beauty of the outdoors is the self-discovery. I need to introduce them, expose them to it and then let them go off and do it.

We do that a lot with the Bibbulmun Track Foundation. We have a program called Walking with Mum/Dad. It transpired from me trekking with my kids because I was concerned that there wasn't a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. I think rites of passage are important. So I'd give them their first Swiss Army knife when they turned eight and take them out on a four-day walk with me and we'd do a section of the Bibbulmun. They would use the compass and map and guide the walk. When people heard about what I was doing they wanted the same for their kids.

We're about to do a program with the Noongar people, an Indigenous people in the south-west, using the Bibbulmun and the Munda Biddi tracks. Part of my proposal is that yes, they can walk for three months on the track, they can graduate, but when they do they have to be given something to perpetuate this change and that's an internship or an apprenticeship. We're

looking at positions for them within the Department of Sports and Recreation, so they can go on and train as camp instructors and eventually run those courses themselves. The Department of Conservation and Environment is keen to offer them ranger positions, too. Eventually it will be young Noongar men who have grown through the course, running the course for other Noongar teenagers that have problems.

I think most people in the outdoor scene are in fact decent people, thoughtful people in the true meaning of the word, in that they think about their place in the world, what they should be contributing, how much they take and correspondingly that they try to give back more than an equal amount.

As a teenager I don't think I considered giving back much. I used [the outdoors] as a description of self, to say this is who I am, I am different to you, I am different because I do this. Then after a while after getting a true sense of myself through the outdoors, I started to think a bit more about everything. You read the books – *Touching The Void*, *Into Thin Air*, *Seven Years in Tibet* – you read them and you start to then understand the philosophy that comes with being in the outdoors and that it's not just an extreme sport mentality. There's a lot more to it than that. Certainly the people I headed into the Himalaya with were deep thinkers.

The Bibbulmun Track stands up as a world-class track. But some places don't need a trail – I think it's important to have untracked wilderness, too. That's an important part of the balance in our country. We need to have places where we don't influence the countryside. We don't need people in every single square foot of the country. Bibbulmun offers one thing, and other trails like the Sterling Ranges Ridge Walk offer a different experience. I wouldn't advocate putting shelters up there because I don't think we need to encourage beginners to go up there. We need to have a stepped level of difficulty, so people learn how to bushwalk on the Bibbulmun before graduating to something more challenging like the South-coast Walk in Tasmania, or something in New Zealand with high passes or where mountaineering skills are required. We don't need huts everywhere we go.

I've come full circle. From the early days where I shed the pack and went paddling, now I do a lot of trekking. It's a lot more comfortable than it was back in the scouting days, with all the high tech gear on offer – and, well, you don't have to carry a boat anywhere.

mundabiddi.org.au
bibbulmuntrack.org.au

Main photo, Mike Wood during a recent visit to Melbourne.



Mountain Running Roundup

John Harding reports

The peak time of the year for trail running events is the spring – early summer period, with at least one major event taking place nearly every weekend. From these events there have been some standout performances.

In the Bright Alpine Four Peaks event in Victoria, 2009 World Games orienteering champion Hanny Allston of Tasmania not only broke the women's race record but she also won two of the four races outright. In a field of almost 300 runners and walkers, Allston slashed 24 minutes off the previous record in running 5 hours, 2 minutes, 36 seconds for the runs up Mystic Hill, Mt Feathertop, Mt Hotham and Mt Buffalo. Vanessa Haverd was second in 5 hours, 51 minutes, 12 seconds and Elizabeth Humphries third in 6 hours, 57 minutes, 59 seconds. In the men's, David Osmond was first in 4 hours, 56 minutes, 17 seconds for the third year in a row, with Robin Rishworth second in 5 hours, 38 minutes, 59 seconds and Ian Cornthwaite third in 5 hours, 40 minutes, 59 seconds.

There was another superb performance by a female runner in the Mt Majura Vineyard Two Peaks 20 kilometres in Canberra. Lisa Flint, the 2009 Australian marathon champion, emulated Allston by winning the race outright in 1 hour, 26 minutes, 41 seconds, a new course record by six minutes. The Three Peaks 26-kilometre race was won by American mountain runner Galen Burrell in a record 1 hour, 46 minutes, 24 seconds, with

top Australian trail runner Alex Matthews second in 1 hour, 47 minutes, 49 seconds. Shannon Jones of Canberra was fastest female in 2 hours, 7 minutes, 6 seconds, a new record by five minutes. Adding to the international flavour, New Zealand's Nick Horspool was victorious the One Peak 12 kilometres in 49 minutes, 16 seconds and Vanessa Haverd was fastest female in 55 minutes, 15 seconds.

In the 44-kilometre Deep Space Mountain Marathon in November, world 48 hour ultra running champion Martin Fryer of Canberra slashed almost seven minutes off the course record. The course has 1800 metres of climbing and includes an ascent of Mt Tennent and a descent to the Orroral Valley and return. Fryer clocked 3 hours, 43 minutes, 1 second, with Dean Davies second in 3 hours, 50 minutes, 5 seconds and David Hosking third in 3 hours, 58 minutes, 38 seconds.

The Tour de Mountain 25 kilometres in Canberra in December saw Angela Bateup cut almost three minutes off the record in running 1 hour, 51 minutes, 55 seconds. Shannon Jones was second in 1 hour, 53 minutes, 40 seconds and Vanessa Haverd third in 1 hour, 54 minutes, 59 seconds. Only three seconds separated the first three males, with John Winsbury five minutes under the course record in 1 hour, 41 minutes, 7 seconds. Alex Matthews was just one second behind and Stuart Doyle another two seconds back.



Martin Fryer, winner of the 44 kilometre Deep Space Mountain Marathon, took seven minutes off the course record. John Harding

Wild Diary

Wild Diary listings provide information about rucksack-sports events and instruction courses. Send items for publication to the Editor, editorial@wild.com.au

March

Six Foot Track Marathon BR
13 March, NSW
www.sixfoot.com

Paddy Pallin Adventure Race Series M
13 March, NSW
www.arcsport.com.au

Kathmandu Adventure Series M
20 March, QLD
www.maxadventure.com.au

Mind Alpine Challenge BR
20–22 March, Vic
www.mindaustalia.org.au

Bush Rogaine 3/6 hr R
21 March, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

6 hr R
27 March, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Australian Rogaining Championships 24 hr R
27–28 March, ACT
www.rogaine.asn.au

Lifestart Kayak for Kids P
28 March, NSW
www.kayakforkids.com.au

April
Easter twentyio, 3-day Orienteering Carnival O
2–11 April, ACT
www.aus3days2010.orienteering.asn.au

Oxfam Trailwalker Melbourne BR
16–18 April, Vic
www2.oxfam.org.au/trailwalker

Tough Bloke Challenge BR
17 April, Vic
www.maxadventure.com.au

Autumn 12 hr R
17 April, NSW
www.rogaine.asn.au

Bribie Island Multisport M
18 April, Qld
www.geocentricoutdoors.com.au

24 hr Adventure Rogaine R
24–25 April, Qld
Bush Rogaine

May

Autumn 12 hr R
1 May, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Paddy Pallin 6 hr R
2 May, ACT
www.rogaine.asn.au

WildEndurance BR
1–3 May, NSW
www.wildendurance.org.au

Bush Rogaine 3/6/9 hr R
9 May, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

North Face 100 BR
15–16 May, NSW
www.thenorthface.com.au/100/

XPD Expedition Race M
17–28 May, Qld
www.geocentricoutdoors.com.au

Kathmandu Adventure Series M
22 May, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

June

Urban Max R
19 June, QLD
www.maxadventure.com.au

Paddy Pallin 6 hr R
20 June, NSW
www.rogaine.asn.au

6/12 hr R
26 June, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

12 hr R
26 June, NT
www.rogaine.asn.au

3/9/24 hr R
26–27 June, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

State Championships 24 hr R
26–27 June, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Activities: BR bush running, P paddling, M multisports, O orienteering, R rogaining. Rogaining events are organised by the State rogaining associations. Canoeing events are organised by the State canoeing associations unless otherwise stated.

Scroggin

Kayak Africa Roadshow

Anyone interested in expedition kayaking one of three public showings of adventurer Beau Miles' remastered documentary, *Africa by Kayak*. It covers his attempt to paddle around the Horn of Africa from the eastern intersection of the Tropic of Capricorn to its western antipode (see *Wild* no 110 to read Beau's account).

Presented by *Wild* and *Outer Edgemagazines*, the events will be attended by Beau, who will host discussions before and after the film. There will also be a half hour performance by rising band, The Animators. Those attending will have the chance to win great prizes with Icebreaker gear and an Australis kayak giveaway.

Showings:

Melbourne: 15 May, Thornbury Theatre, 7pm \$20

Sydney: 21 May, National Museum, 7pm, \$25.
Brisbane: 26 May, Powerhouse/Visy Theatre, 7pm, \$25.

The first five people to book their seat will win a copy of the DVD and the Animators CD (five prize packs per showing), winners can only collect prizes at showing. Book by contacting Beau: beaudy@hotmail.com / 0419 163 002.

A gondola for Buffalo?

In Victoria the Alpine Shire Council is investigating the feasibility of what they are

calling an 'iconic tourism proposal' – building a gondola up Mt Buffalo. The proposal is in its very early stages, with the council giving approval for an investigation and a report, which could then be used to apply for government funding. To find out more about the project or to comment on it, should contact Sabine Helsper on sabine.helsper@bigpond.com

Queensland's Great Walks

John Chapman reports that a \$10 million dollar program to create six great walks has been completed in Queensland. They are all multiday walks with designated campsites and multiple access points for shorter trips. The walks are, Fraser Island (90 kilometres, eight campsites); Gold Coast Hinterland (54 kilometres, three campsites); Mackay Highlands (56 kilometres, four campsites); Sunshine Coast Hinterland (58 kilometres, three campsites); Whitsunday (30 kilometres, two campsites) and Wet Tropics (three separate walks of 37, 57 and 43 kilometres with eight campsites).

A further \$6.5 million is being spent creating four more great walks. Carnarvon, an 86-kilometre circuit with five campsites has already been completed. The Whitsunday Ngara Sea Trail has also opened but it is different to the others as it is a boat-based journey with short day walks on islands. The two other great walks, Cooloolool (90 kilometres

with four campsites) and Conondale Range (60 kilometres with three campsites) are both on track for completion in mid-2010. For further information refer to

www.derm.qld.gov.au

Access to Scotts Peak

The summer bus service that has been provided by Tassielink from Hobart to Scotts Peak Dam for over two decades has been cancelled. Hiring a taxi or chartering a mini-bus are the only options. The most popular mini-bus charter service to Scotts Peak is operated by Evans Coaches, phone (03) 62971335. During summer they expect to run several charters each week. A minimum charge applies for charters and for small groups, if you are flexible with times, it is sometimes possible to share a charter service with others.

Corrections

Just a few small blunders in the last issue: in the article 'Floating Down the Colo' we misspelt Wollangambe, while in the Cape to Cape track notes on page 49 we mistakenly identified a weed as native grass, it is apparently hare's tail grass. Finally, in Reviews on page 73 we listed the wrong publisher for *Rugged Beyond Imagination*, it should have been the National Museum of Australia Press.

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Getting Grounded

Quentin Chester comes down to earth in the midst of the Gammons

Back on the rocks again – Alasdair McGregor, Peter Stroud and Chris Stroud on their way up Gammon Creek. Photo by the author

THE HELICOPTER CLATTERED TO LIFE AND lifted off its gravel pad. In less than a minute we had banked to the north-west so the High Country came into view. First the outer hills of the Balcanoona Range, then the entire eastern flank of the Gammon Ranges, from Mt McKinlay to the Blue Range, lined up before us. All along the horizon boulder-filled creeks snuck between long exposed ridges, only to vanish into the deep shadows of a gorge or narrow chasm.

In our straight-line rush to the heart of the Gammons, we climbed high above them. On the edge of the plateau our pilot put the chopper into a series of dizzying orbits above landmarks like Cleft Peak, Prow Point, Mt John Roberts and Steadman Ridge. As we swooped and turned I strained to keep a visual hold on the terrain until it felt like my eyes were about to pop their sockets.

It wasn't just the challenge of identifying familiar landmarks from odd angles that got me going. There was also the sense of looking into a past that was fragmenting before our eyes. After a while I started spotting single features – shaded creek junctions, stone bluffs, waterfalls, scree runnels, summit cairns and small terrace campsites – that I'd visited on assorted walking trips over many years. Before long all sorts of recollections seem to detach and scatter in my head. I could cope, more or less, with the suspension of belief needed when seriously airborne with rotors whirling above your ears. But I hadn't realised my mind would be spinning just as fast.

It was nearly two years before I found a time to return to this corner of the northern Flinders Ranges. By various means I lured three old compadres – Alasdair McGregor and brothers

Pete and Chris Stroud – for a wander near Gammon Hill, an outlying dome in the northwestern corner of the Vulkathunha – Gammon Ranges National Park. The spinifex-dotted hill wasn't the main drawcard; my interest was the encircling gorge system I had spied on the homeward leg of my helicopter ride.

So, ostensibly our walk was about visiting a new locale, a ravine with more bends than a coiled python, yet for me there was an even more basic agenda. For months I'd had a simple craving to be inside the Gammons. It didn't much matter where, as long as I got there on foot. For some reason I needed to reset my bearings.

Gammon Creek is one of the less travelled pathways into the ranges. Its catchment is confined to the Gammon Hill and surrounding high country. Compared with the upper labyrinths of nearby Arcoona and Italoie creeks it makes a relatively humble journey to the plains. Nevertheless, for a quartet of car-weary, bush-starved walkers there was spectacle aplenty.

We doddled upstream, testing out our knees by rock hopping. Beyond the outer defences of the Yankaniinna Range the creek splits in two. While one branch veered to the south-west, we followed the tributary heading east. Thankfully recent rains had filled the small waterholes in the gorge, a comforting thought given the potential for thirsty work ahead. Not only that, but the pools formed perfectly mirrored reflections of the ochre-shaded rock walls and native pines all around us. In this outdoor gallery the artworks were on the ground.

Whatever physical disorders our party carried, a lack of visual imagination was not

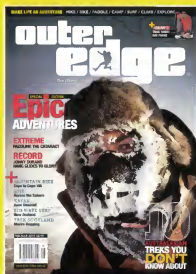
one of them. Each of us in our own way was a miniaturist, happy to squander perfectly good walking time on flowers, the texture of a pebble or leafy shadows swaying on a rock face. No detail was too small to ignore. We toyed with our cameras. We pontificated – anything to avoid a worrying degree of haste or exertion. Best of all we appointed Alasdair as expedition artist. That gave us an ironclad excuse for stopping and setting up camp early so he could knock out a watercolour or two.

Embracing the slacker's approach also gave my senses time to recalibrate. Hour by hour the Gammons that was familiar to me – grass trees up close, big gorge walls overhead, masses of backlit spinifex, breezes hissing on the ridgetops and native pine scents drifting by – returned. That first night, as I lay beneath a tarp, I nestled my hip into the crunchy creek gravel under the sleeping mat. I was tucked up in a gorge. And I was grounded. It felt good to be back.

There's no question that seeing so much of this country from the air had been exhilarating. However the experience also became strangely jarring – and not just because the rotor blades needed tuning. Of all the spots I visit regularly, the Gammons is the one I think of as most inaccessible and hard-won. The best bits of the region are well beyond the reach of roads. In fact a lot of the terrain is barely navigable on foot. To fly so effortlessly over the gorges seemed almost belittling, as if we were giving the place the finger.

It's easy to take for granted the connectedness that walking gives us. Even alone-key amble in the bush awakens an unspoken way of being, a physical knowledge of nature that humans have inherited over

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thousands of millennia. Walking in more demanding environments can create an even deeper imprinting of place. Not the views and photos we grab atop a steep ridge, but an acute sense of scale and terrain that's seemingly stored to memory via muscle and sinew.

Any concern about losing such ties to the Gammons was soon erased the following day. It began with a shortcut – always a dicey thing in these parts. Leaving the main creek we pushed south up a long gully aiming for the crest of the range. Like many a shortcut, what it lacked in brevity it made up for with surprises: overhanging waterfalls, terrific vegetation and steep ramps to scramble up. Judging from the creek's fallen branches and flood debris, no one had walked this way for many generations.

By the time we hauled ourselves on to the upper slopes of Gammon Hill most of the day had vanished. Our limbs ached. Rather than pressing on we sat amongst the summit shrubbery, ate lunch and gazed across the vastness of Mainwater Pound. The photos I had taken earlier from the air turned this valley and the massive spurs plunging off the Blue Range into an abstraction of scalloped hills, a bit like the aerial art practised by master photographer Richard Woldendorp.

As we nibbled on chunks of cheese, Chris and Pete recalled a walk we'd done eight years earlier, a long slog up one of the spurs from Bolla Bollana Creek to the highest point in the Gammons – Benbonyatthe Hill. Nothing abstract about that. Step after slow step; an entire afternoon weaving among fractured sandstone blocks and perky clumps of spinifex. And at the top it was the same feeling back then as now, a kind of joyful soreness. If we thought we had the landscape's measure, then it certainly had ours.

That recollection and the distant views north prompted tales of earlier trips to Arkaroola and Mt Painter, as well as traverses of Freeling Heights and the Mawson Plateau's lost kingdoms. All those gullies and painstaking climbs and bone-jarring descents. So many dreamed-of places. Not to mention the lazy gorge afternoons with Alasdair painting above a river bend, or Peter in the shade with a copy of the *Guardian* or Chris at one with his frying pan over a campfire.

These are places that live in us. The topography is part of our animal memory. Staring along the contours and listening to the stories being summoned, I could feel tendons twitch and blood pumping.

While we lingered atop Gammon Hill high clouds were gathering behind us along the horizon to the south. Perhaps inspired by trips of old we decided to push further into the ranges. There was no track to follow, just a notion that a way could be found down off the escarpment to Wild Ass Creek. In fading light we threaded among bands of rock, scrambling down muddy runnels and bulging stone outcrops plastered with lichen.

The descent was cruel on our knees. Not only that, but there was a sudden urgency to find water and some kind of nook to camp in. Little pools appeared soon enough among polished stone hollows in the gully. But it was

almost pitch black before we happened upon a site with enough roughly horizontal sleeping ledges to accommodate all of us.

We were now adrift in uncharted territory, deep in the tangle of watercourses that tumble from the Gammons Plateau. The original plan was to fossick our way to the head of Arcoona Creek and return by a high ridge to Gammon Hill. However, given the state of various joints, climbing back to the crest of the range was no longer an option. Adding further spice to the mix was the arrival of low cloud and spotting rain.

Over the next 36 hours our walking progress was pitifully slow. Then the rain came, forcing us to cower behind rocks and trees as pelting showers raked in from the south-west. None of this really seemed to matter, given the splendid isolation of these valleys and our curiosity for the nature of things. We lavished attention on every meal, crafted our photos and generally looked busy while Alasdair did his paintings. The walk had reached that point where a spirit of making-do was now at large. No stumble or mishap really seemed to matter. We were surviving. Best of all we didn't have to slog back up to Gammon Hill.

On our last night, serious rain started spattering not long after we'd gone to bed. Lying in what was the main watercourse of Ecchler Creek, I was the most vulnerable. After an hour or so of being woken by the sound of the drops on my silver tarp I retreated to the shelter of a mighty overhang near Sambot Waterhole.

I awoke soon after first light. My cave was beautifully dry. Soon the others would stagger down in various states of dampness and disarray to join me – and then we would sit eating crispy bacon and drinking smoky tea while the warm sun poured into the cave and steam rose from Alasdair's drying sleeping bag – but for the first hour or so I had the glistening creek all to myself. In the wake of the storm the trunks of the native pines were a jet black against the bright green foliage. Every scrap of bark or bank of stones reflected the warm light.

In the midst of all this there was a minute or so when the clouds directly overhead parted to reveal the heavens in all their brilliant blueness. It was like peering up from some deep cavern. In one corner of this pane of sky I could just see the upper reaches of North Tusk Hill and then, for a split second, a solitary wedge-tailed eagle gliding towards Arcoona Saddle.

For most of my walking life I have fantasised about being where the eagles soared. I yearned to know what it felt like to gaze from aloft at all these peaks and gorges. But at this moment I realised that it was even better to be where I belonged – on the loose in the wild, with both feet on the ground. ☼

A Wild contributor since issue no 3, Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and the author of six books about wilderness places. His preferred habitats include isolated corners of the outback and northern Australia, offshore islands and obscure gorges in the Flinders Ranges. His latest book is *Tales from the Bush* and his web blog is at: <http://quentinchester.blogspot.com>



Left, Stuart Imer and Michael Hampton on the South Ridge of Mt Giles. The Larapinta Trail traverses the high ridges on the far side of the Alice Valley. West MacDonnell National Park, Northern Territory.

All photos by the author

a walk through the Chewings

Glenn Tempest explores the Chewings Range on an epic three-week trip through this rugged area

I'VE BEEN AT HOME FOR ALMOST A WEEK now. My body still aches and I keep discovering spinifex splinters in my fingers. Strangely though, it's not my body that's the problem, it's my mind. I keep drifting back to those three weeks and 250 kilometres spent walking the length of the Chewings Range in the Northern Territory. The reality of my here and now seems diluted and my memories of those wide blue skies and red ochre mountains refuse to fade.

After breakfast the four of us shouldered our rucksacks and walked down the Alice Springs Mall towards the Todd River. An Indigenous guitarist belted out a rendition of Jimmy Barnes' 'Working Class Man' as a smiling Japanese tourist committed him to video. Half an hour later, we arrived at the Telegraph Station, a green oasis and the official start (depending upon your direction of travel) of the Larapinta Trail. Barely a kilometre on we met our first through-walkers: a mother and daughter team, smiles as big as the sky and 15 memorable days out from Redbank Gorge. Their clothes were worn and they smelt of sand and sweat. We were the track newbies, slightly embarrassed by our clean clothes and pale Melbourne complexions. But all that would change.

The Chewings Range runs east from Alice Springs and is encompassed by the West MacDonnell National Park. Its crumbling backbone of high peaks and deep gorges

stretches for 180 kilometres to Ormiston Gorge, its complex topography resulting in the most substantial mountain range in Central Australia. The Larapinta Trail – now surely Australia's most iconic long distance walk – weaves through the Chewings Range for its first seven days before leaving it behind at Hugh Gorge to cross the broad Alice Valley. Between Hugh Gorge and Ormiston Gorge the Chewings Range is a wild place indeed. There are no walking tracks, no information as to the whereabouts of reliable water, and of course no easy rescue in the event of an accident.

For the first seven days we followed the Larapinta Trail. It's the third time that Karen and I have walked this route and we are still captivated by the vast scale of the surroundings. Familiar campsites were ticked off one by one: Wallaby Gap, Simpsons Gap, Mulga Camp and Jay Creek. At dusk the dingoes moved among the mallee and witchetty bushes, their blue-green eyes glowing in our headtorch beams. These four-legged ghosts became our nightly companions, their mournful howling sending shivers down spines. The fifth night was spent at Standley Chasm where we picked up our food dump, and the following morning we struggled up Brinkley Bluff carrying 11 days of food and fuel. Without the will or the strength to carry the extra water required for a dry camp on the 1209-metre summit, we pushed through to Birthday Waterhole. It turned into an 18-kilometre day and we reached the



"Ice crystals on our tents the following morning sparkled in the weak sunshine and a biting breeze rustled the eucalypt leaves."

waterhole totally spent. Sleeping bags were embraced early, and the easy drift to sleep was accompanied by the sonar clicks of bats circling overhead.

The following day we arrived at Hugh Gorge, one of the scenic wonders of the Larapinta Trail. Our tents, pitched in the riverbed, were dwarfed by brick-red walls that loomed 200 metres above our heads. In the cool shadows of the afternoon we rock-hopped up the narrowing gorge to a chasm filled with still water. Dark stains scoured its red polished walls, hinting of violent floods beyond all comprehension.

In the morning Michael, Stuart and I set off on a day walk to climb Peak 1245, the rarely visited highest point along this section of the Chewings Range. After scrambling up a long knife-like ridge to the western rim of the gorge, we continued across open stony tops to reach our isolated summit by lunchtime. A couple of stacked rocks were the only indication that others had been here before

us. From our lofty vantage point the Chewings Range stretched away to the east, where it eventually vanished into the desert haze.

The next morning, while walking south through Hugh Gorge with its long stretches of pebbles interspersed with mirror-like pools, our quiet surroundings were briefly shattered when a helicopter swung overhead. Its sudden cacophonous intrusion amplified the stillness of the gorge. Later we learnt that a woman had broken her leg further along the track and had been airlifted to hospital in Alice Springs.

At the end of the gorge we left the Larapinta Trail behind and turned west into mulga and mallee woodland. We were now on our own. Walking through the foothills that butted up to the mountains was surprisingly easy and by mid-afternoon we reached our campsite just outside of Bulldog Gorge. This small broken watercourse was dotted with shallow pools of clear water, guarded by old cycads and ghost gums. Rock wallabies watched from high on the red cliffs above.

The tenth day saw us following brumby tracks through the mulga. It soon became obvious that these dusty paths linked to each of the gorges along our direction of travel. In the couple of small gorges we visited along the way, the water had already dried up, leaving only stagnant puddles. It was with some relief that, at a bend in the creek, we were greeted by the sound of finches – birds that rarely stray far from water. Sure enough,

a small waterhole revealed itself and the rest of the afternoon was spent happily relaxing on nearby rocks and basking in the warm sunshine.

The following day took us deeper into a spider's web of interconnecting dry creek beds, rocky hollows and spinifex hills. The approach to Ellery Creek Fish Hole was marked by a proliferation of cowpats, dusty cattle tracks and, of course, flies. Mummified carcasses and bleaching bones became a regular sight and the damage to the surrounding landscape was disheartening to observe.

Ellery Creek Fish Hole is a meandering ribbon of white sand squeezed between polished red bluffs and lined with graceful red gums. It's one of only a handful of easily navigable gorges that bisect the Chewings Range and it was our last easy crossing. We set up camp in the creekbed, then went in search of water in a nearby narrow chasm. Approaching its entrance we contemplated what forces must have conspired to create such a deep parallel cleft – millennia of wind and water erosion seemed just as inconceivable as a giant woodsman taking an enormous axe and striking the mountain with a single almighty blow. Inside its cool interior was a Jurassic world of tall leafy trees, cycad palms, delicate ferns and pools of icy water. A swooping pterodactyl, its wings almost touching the walls, would not have seemed out of place.



Our 12th day was spent entirely on the northern side of the range, following a tortuously winding gorge to a tributary watercourse that eventually turned into yet another narrow gorge. Uncertain whether it was possible to get through, we eventually traversed above a pool of water, scrambled up a dry waterfall and unexpectedly exited on to a broad open valley. After the cool confines of the gorge, exposure to the full brunt of the sun was brutal, and as the day progressed every opportunity was taken to find relief under the shade of the occasional bloodwood.

Fortunately the walking was easy, the pace fast and the route took us past the entrances to a series of spectacular gorges, such as the mythical-sounding Canyon of Defiance, which had us all reaching for our cameras. The enormous red walls of the gorge rose to almost the full height of the range, its grand scale attempting to swallow the very mountains that embraced it. A ragged line of tall gums deep in its shady confines hinted at the possibility of water. Enticing as it was, we left the canyon behind and pushed on down a narrow creekbed, accompanied by a flock of colourful ringneck parrots. An hour later we reached Portals Canyon and set up our tents in a wonderful sandy watercourse filled with red gums and flowering wattle.

Portals Canyon was the key to our route back over the Chewings Range, but it quickly became obvious that it was not going to be as straightforward as hoped. A series of stepped

Evening light across the Chewings Range on day 12.

Right, the author scrambling through yet another unnamed gorge near Ellery Creek Fish Hole.

ponds led to a dark slot, barely a metre wide, 70 metres high and filled with deep icy water. Swimming and floating our gear through was an option, but not an attractive one. Michael and I scrambled up to a rocky shoulder overlooking the chasm, in the hope of discovering a less demanding entry into the canyon beyond. The view that greeted us took our breath away. Beyond lay a twisting gorge, its convoluted path embraced by vertical red cliffs and tottering pillars of yellow stone. Rising above this chaos were steep slopes of loose rubble, which unfolded into towering 100-metre-high rock walls – a chasm inside a gorge within a canyon.

Much of the following day was spent slowly picking our way down into the gorge and then pushing a route up through it, at one point ferrying our rucksacks up a vertical 30-metre wall, until eventually a dry waterfall above a dark pool stopped us in our tracks. Climbing out was a possibility, but our 15 metres of six-millimetre diameter rope didn't provide much confidence. Eventually the key to our escape from Portals Canyon presented itself, when a water-washed runnel led us through the cliffs and on to the spinifex slopes above. That



evening we set up camp on a high col in the middle of the range, where a cold southerly wind buffeted us all night until morning revealed heavy clouds racing across a gunmetal sky. The smell of rain was in the air during our descent through an open valley and into 45 Degree Gorge, the first drops caught us scrambling down its narrow lower reaches, squeezing through the smooth claustrophobic confines created by a million years of water erosion. The thought of being caught in a flash flood was appalling, and we increased our pace. Thankfully the downpour was short-lived and as we arrived at the bottom of the gorge the clouds parted to reveal a watery blue sky.

"In the early hours the wind swung to the south and by 3am it was gale force. We collapsed the tent to save it from ripping to shreds and burrowed deep into our sleeping bags waiting for dawn."

On our 14th day we reached a remarkable small creek hidden deep in the fold of a wooded hill. Unlike other creeks in the Chevings Range, this one flows perpetually, fed by a spring almost a kilometre away to form one of the most beautiful permanent watercourses in Central Australia. No longer marked on official maps, its rock pools and cascades suffered from years of overuse and devastating attention of thirsty cattle and horses. A number of years ago Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife fenced off this part of the valley and the creek has since recovered much of its original beauty.

Ice crystals on our tents the following morning sparkled in the weak sunshine and a biting breeze rustled the eucalypt leaves. We continued walking west and by midday were beneath the towering South Face of Mt Giles. Leaving our rucksacks below the South Ridge we made a short detour into a shallow rocky gully to collect water. Karen and I had visited here two years earlier and we knew we'd find a good supply. The healthy looking water was clear and cold, and populated by large frogs and water scorpions. Having drunk our fill, we lay sleepily in the shadow of the mountain listening to the birds squawking. With a 550-metre vertical gain in just 1.2 kilometres, the South Ridge is one of the most enjoyable rock scrambles in the country. It took us just under two hours to scramble up the crest, with the landscape unfolding around us. A dozen parallel mountain ranges swept off east and west, the red smudge of the surrounding desert inching ever closer. Two wedge-tailed eagles rode the warm air currents high above, entirely disinterested in us.

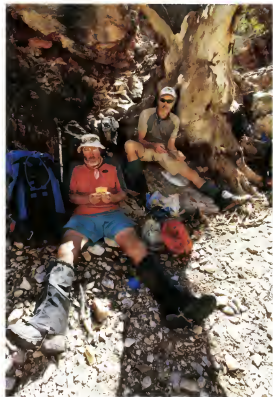
Mt Giles (1389 metres) is the third highest mountain in the Northern Territory. Its precipitous North and South Faces drop 600 metres to the valleys below and the narrow summit ridge adds greatly to the drama of the ascent. This was my second visit to peak, and I have yet to experience a more breathtaking view from any inland mountain in Australia. Within minutes of the sun setting, the

temperature had dropped to below zero. We huddled around our stoves, re-hydrated our evening meal and listened to the wind whipping across the rocks. Michael and Stuart bivvied under a low eucalypt, while Karen and I squeezed into our tent. In the early hours the wind swung to the south and by 3 am it was gale force. We collapsed the tent to save it from ripping to shreds and burrowed deep





Clockwise from far left, Karen Tempest descending 45 Degree Gorge. Karen Tempest and Michael Hampton above deep pools while descending the steep and convoluted 45 Degree Gorge. Michael Hampton and Stuart Imer relaxing during lunch in Portals Canyon.



into our sleeping bags waiting for dawn.

On a freezing morning it was a relief to get packed up and away. Descending the West Ridge was easier than expected and by 9 am we were walking north along the first section of the long dogleg escarpment that embraces Ormiston Pound. We followed the crest of the escarpment west but, by afternoon, the walking was difficult, tiring and painfully slow. After three awful hours Michael nicknamed our ridge the Trog of Doom. Worse was to come.

The end of the escarpment overlooking Bowmans Gap is ringed with high cliffs and the descent is steep, loose and dangerous. By the time we reached Ormiston Creek it was almost dark. For an hour and a half we picked our way along the creekbed and through Ormiston Gorge, our headtorches casting eerie shadows across the sand and our voices echoing off unseen walls. After 22 kilometres and 12 arduous hours, Ormiston Campground finally loomed. With muscles aching and the soles of our feet bruised and sore, we crawled into our tents and slept the sleep of the dead.

Two days later we reached Redbank Gorge and the end of our adventure. Along the way Michael and Stuart climbed Mt Sonder by

its South-east Ridge, while Karen and I explored the colourful mallee woodland that the Larapinta winds through.

Sheilagh, a friend and the owner of the nearby Glen Helen Resort, arrived to pick us up. Driving back to Alice Springs I watched the Chewings Range rise and fall across the horizon. I forced myself to think about plane schedules and a three-week backlog of phone messages. In the end it was all too much, so I let those wide blue skies and red ochre mountains wash over me again. 🌄

Glenn Tempest is a Melbourne-based writer and photographer. He manages to keep the dingo from the door by writing rockclimbing and bushwalking guidebooks. His adventures have taken him to all corners of the globe yet his true passion remains the wild places of Australia.

Authors note: the Chewings Range west of Hugh Gorge is untracked wilderness and is only suitable for experienced walkers willing to navigate through semi-arid mountainous terrain. Most of the place names I have referred to have been made up by walkers over the years and few are officially recognised. Some place names I have left out all together. Walkers must be completely self-reliant, have good navigational skills and be able to locate water along the way. Walking in the Chewings Range should be confined to the winter months and only during times of average or above average water levels.





The Australian

Steve Waters bags the highest peak in each state and territory

Looking out towards Pelion Gap from the summit of Mt Ossa, Tasmania's highest peak.

Grant Dixon

8

IT'S 1994. WORK'S DRAGGING. THE NEW GUY looks at me and says: 'What's the point, everything's already been done?'

'The point is, it hasn't been done by us,' I reply. 'Like climbing the highest mountain in each state and mainland territory.'

Paul was hooked. We went out, scored a map, identified the peaks and did zero work. Thus began our version of the Australian Eight, an odyssey that would take 12 years to complete, see us crisscross the continent numerous times and cement a deep friendship.

The subject of peakbagging is never far from controversy (see recent Wildfires). Why are people so goal-obsessed? Is it for the much-anticipated but seldom-lasting feeling of satisfaction on attainment? Or is it the thrill of the hunt, the challenge of logistical planning, seeking the goal rather than realising it?

Some see peaks as a yardstick: 'I've bagged it, therefore I am.' Others just like to collect: 'Look, here's my shiny list of summits, between the Tanganyika stamps and my set of rare Mongolian beer mats.'

Perhaps Sir Hugh Munro had the right idea by dying before completing his (now famous) list of ascents.

Personally, I think goals are okay. Particularly when travel is involved. And when they incorporate travel, wilderness and a beltingly difficult, searingly steep, humungous virgin slab of pre-cambrian geology devoid of other people, goals are absolutely sensational.

Aside from the Munros (and their offspring, the Corbetts, Donalds, Grahams, Nuttalls, Hewitts and Wainwrights), other famous (and not-so-famous) peak collections include the Seven Summits (the highest peak on each continent), the Seven Second Summits (yep, you guessed it), the Eight-Thousanders (peaks over 8000 metres), the Fourteeners (mountains over 14 000 feet) and our own Tassie Abels (Tasmanian summits that are over 1100 metres). Adventurers have even started on the Seven Tallest Volcanoes, the Seven Deepest Caves and the Seven Worst Tasmanian Bogs. And last but not least, some applause for the Confluencers (people who visit each of the latitude and longitude integer degree intersections in the world –

www.confluence.org) who are just plain silly.

Which brings us to the Australian Eight – a motley, disparate group of ancient eroded sandstone, granite, iron, quartz and dolerite lumps separated by thousands of kilometres of Dreamtime and included due to the arbitrary lines of 19th century mapmakers.

Is it peak-bagging? Probably, though only Tuvaluans and Australians would classify all eight as actual 'peaks'. Is it acquisitive? That depends on where you stand. For us the journey was everything, the peak merely an excuse to venture to parts of Australia we normally wouldn't visit. More often than not the actual summits were an anti-climax. Mostly, it was just about being there. Am I lying? Possibly. I'm still trying to explain that second trip to Zeil.

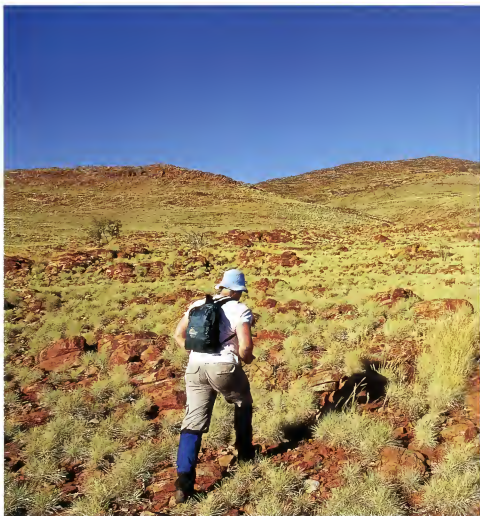
Getting to the actual peaks required more logistical planning than most of the ascents. Some people knock them off all at once. We had no rules or time limits, and sure, we could've included offshore islands and sub-Antarctic territories, but we didn't. We did throw in the four mainland cardinal extremities (Steepest Point, Cape York, South Point, Cape Byron) so the goal is thankfully, as yet, unfinished. Should we start to get close, there's Lake Eyre and South East Cape. See how goals work? Even Sir Hugh was canny enough to expand his original list.

While there are many different routes and approaches to all of the Eight, we usually chose the easiest path and all but one (Ossa) can normally be completed as a day walk. The summits are evenly split between alpine and desert environments, with Bartle Frere the anomaly, sitting in tropical rainforest. Picking the right season does help. Zeil in summer is a crazy thing; Bogong in winter is superb.

Mt Kosciuszko (2228 metres)

It seemed logical to start with Kosi, given we actually knew where to find it, and its gentle reputation might serve to lure some women along. Sure, Messner thought it unworthy (his version of the Seven Summits swaps Kosciuszko for Indonesia's Carstensz Pyramid) but it's not like you can drive to West Papua in six hours.

The first weekend in June, 1995, saw four of us crammed into an aging Torana driving up the Alpine Way. The sporting route from the north-



west starts at Geehi Flats and ascends Hannells Spur. With an altitude gain of almost 1750 vertical metres, it's arguably the highest ascent in Australia. We didn't take it. Nor did we complete the stunningly beautiful Lakes Circuit that departs from Charlottes Pass. Instead, we jumped on the Crackenback chairlift at Thredbo with the rest of the tourists, then strolled the last few kilometres along snow-covered boardwalk. On the marginally higher lump designated the 'summit' we celebrated with champagne and a gourmet picnic. This seemed pretty easy. Paul broke in his nice new Zamberlans by kicking icicles; the boots are still scarred to this day.

Mt Bogong (1986 metres)

Bogong has at least four commonly climbed ridges, and all have minor variations. The most accessible routes are from the north.

Two weeks after Kosi, we left Mountain Creek car park with packs full of more gourmet goodies, heading for Eskdale Spur. Lisa was only wearing runners and had skipped breakfast. We hit the snow at Camp Creek Gap, and by the time we reached the old Michell Hut she was feeling pretty cold. Inside, we gave up trying to boil water on our ancient Gaz, as icicles were forming on the windows. It was warmer to keep walking.

Above the treeline the wind was ferocious, the route steepened dramatically and visibility

plummeted. We crawled from snow pole to snow pole. Lisa and Paul were bringing up the rear. Lisa having no jacket had donned a plastic garbage bag. Her runners gave no traction and Paul was supplying the footholds. Cheryl, Paul's (future) wife showed better survival skills and raced up the slope, only to spend the rest of the time cowering behind the top pole waiting for the rest of us. Once on top we caught the full blast of the wind, turning any exposed skin to ice. One blurry photo and we headed straight for the Staircase Spur, all picnic pretensions forgotten. Lisa was beyond speech by this stage and we kept her on a tight tether. Turns out it was the coldest day in ten years.

Mt Ossa (1617 metres)

Having our naivety scoured away by the elements didn't decrease our enthusiasm. We knocked off training trips to Feathertop, South Cape and Mt Difficult, and a few months later we were walking up the Arm River track across the Pelion Plains.

Most people approach Ossa from Pelion Gap on the Overland Track. We dumped the packs, sidled Mt Doris then headed straight for the snow-covered horns. Lisa, still scarred from Bogong, freaked at the sight of the steep slope. However, the snow was good, the angle deceptive and thankfully she'd replaced her garbage bag and runners with more appropriate gear. Paul led the easy traverse



After making such a great start, life intervened: priorities changed, families started, jobs and countries changed more than once, and the girls fell away. It was 1998 before we found time for another outing.

Mt Bimberi (1912 metres)

Bimberi was a strange one. Sitting on the NSW/ACT border, it's only slightly higher than other tops in the Brindabellas. Information was scant. The easiest access appeared to be from the NSW side, along the Murray Gap fire track, though we had to wait until spring for the road north of Tantangara Reservoir to open. A more interesting route might be south along the crest of the range from Mt Gingera.

Oldfields Hut was the only landmark on a monotonous fire track plod to Murrays Gap. The Gap itself was a beautiful swampy saddle from which we scrub-bashed directly to the summit. Paul brewed up while I checked the logbook. 'What good track?' Apparently there was a path from the Gap that we'd missed altogether. Finding the pad on the descent took us to the north-east corner of the saddle.

Mt Bartle Frere (1622 metres)

There are two main routes, the more common eastern route starting at Josephine Falls car park, and the lesser used, though reportedly easier, western approach from Gourka Gourka. The elevation gain on the eastern route is over 1500 metres, making it one of the tallest ascents in the country. Make no mistake, it's a big day out.

Left, Paul getting down to business on Woodroffe. Below, our fence line guided us off the West Ridge of Mt Zeil.

All uncredited photos by the author



and the view was magnificent, which was good because on the summit 20 minutes later it was a whiteout. I rushed another snow-blurred timer shot of impatient people staring out from under icy hoods. It was a long day and almost dark by the time we staggered into Kia Ora Hut.

The only free time we could manage was just before Christmas in maximum humidity. Flying up in the morning meant it was midday before we left Josephine Falls. We spent four hours crawling steeply upwards over tree roots through a gloomy, leech-infested rainforest, before finally emerging from the

trees. Biting flies replaced the leeches as we boulder-hopped for another hour, with the only decent view at the false summit.

Leaving the top at 5:30 pm, we were conscious daylight was quickly running out. It was almost pitch dark when we discovered one of our headtorches was broken. Stiflingly hot and well out of water, we endured a very slow and slippery descent, getting off-track numerous times. Eventually we made it down to the creek where we rested and conserved our torch battery, only to be mesmerised by a forest full of fireflies. This buoyed our somewhat sagging spirits and while still slow, the rest was easy. Descending with one torch took as long as the ascent and by the time we were stripping off all our leech-encrusted gear under our headlights, we'd been out for ten hours and were totally knackered.

Mt Meharry (1253 metres)

Meharry lurks out in the Pilbara region of northern Western Australia, not far from the mining township of Newman, a good ten-hour drive from anywhere. As peaks go, it's pretty much a fizzer – this one's all about the trip.

Meharry was the first of our desert summits. In May 1999 we flew into Perth, hired a Camry, and headed up the coast. We took a couple of detours – to Steep Point near Shark Bay, then on to the gorges of Karinjini National Park, where we spent a few hours exploring the magnificent canyons. Too many hours. We'd underestimated the driving time to Meharry. Arriving at the turnoff after dark, we discovered we'd also underestimated the road in – four-wheel drive only. This was bad luck for the Camry, and possibly for our deposit. There was nothing for it but to flog the poor Toyota along an appallingly eroded track, scratching, scraping and fording creeks until the road proved impassible. This was the start of the climb. The moon was full and provided ample light for what proved a quick, straightforward ascent along an old vehicle track, though the obligatory summit photo was skipped as neither of us had a flash. The Camry received another belting on the way out but a date with cutting compound number two in Perth a few days later had it looking almost new, and our deposit was fully refunded.

Mt Zeil (1531 metres)

Getting to Zeil is the main problem. Sitting on the extreme western boundary of the West Macdonnell National Park, the only public approach is from the south, at least a two-day walk from the nearest access (Redbank Gorge). Shorter routes from the west and north entail crossing private property and historically, the landholders haven't been very approachable. The situation has eased somewhat in recent years with the western landholder the more amenable, but you must ask! The ranger station in Alice Springs is the best place for advice and permits.

Information on Zeil was hard to come by in the year 2000. Once again, we let life instead of common sense dictate the season and made the mistake of going in December. Paul was living in Singapore, so we met in Darwin before driving down to Alice. Out beyond the Tanami Track, we crept uninvited down a fence line. It was stinking hot, oppressively humid and the 1:250 000 Hermannsburg map was pretty useless. Thick scrub, spinifex and a number of low ridges protect the northern approaches and we wasted a lot of time and energy getting to the hill proper. Once climbing, it pays to stay as high and south as possible, not always easy when sliding knolls from the north. We took five litres of water each but made a serious navigation error, coming too far east out of a saddle, and ended up after four hours looking into a steep ravine. With most of our water gone, we prudently bailed. It was a long, thirsty, demoralising walk back to the car. Luckily, one creek was still running and Paul all but sat in it. We retired to Alice to lick our wounds.

They took six years to help. This time we returned in winter, with better information, a proper vehicle, and even permission from rangers and landowners. Dashwood Crossing Bore felt very remote as we approached from the west in an attempt to bypass the northern scrub. Camping by the fence line at the base of the west ridge, Paul got a roaring fire going as the temperature plummeted with the setting sun.

We made an early start the next morning after a freezing night, made colder by reading aloud passages from *The Worst Journey In The World* (a memoir of Scott's tragic 1910–1913 Antarctic Expedition). What a difference the season makes. The air was crisp and impossibly clear as we headed up the west ridge, with an icy wind blasting up the centre of the continent. Again, we each lugged five litres of water, though this time the going was a lot easier and it was satisfying to gain some altitude immediately. We passed a lone gum on the ridge top, the only tree of any significance on the whole mountain. The views were incredible – tracks and fence-lines radiated out straight as spokes into the red desert under the silent gaze of Haast Bluff and Mt Huegel.

The west ridge leads on to a plateau which must be traversed, then down into a saddle. We kept to the south as much as possible to avoid the false leads of the northerly spurs. It was then a case of ascend (or slide) a knoll, descend to a saddle, ascend the next knoll, all the while trying to keep to the main ridge, by either going over the high point of the knoll or sidling as high as possible. The wind was very strong and still freezing and we remained in windproofs all morning. After five hours, the radio beacon appeared and we emerged on to the summit after a quick gully scramble. The logbook showed only a handful of visitors all year. A quick lunch then 30 minutes later we returned the same way, our fence line guiding us off the west ridge. We made it down just on sunset, and camped another night, too tired to navigate out. This was easily the most memorable and satisfying of the Eight.

Mt Woodroffe (1435 metres)

If Bimberi and Zeil had scant information, Woodroffe had even less. On Pitjantjatjara land, getting a permit makes it the most logistically demanding, and the easiest way of getting there is with a tour company.

In 2007, Desert Tracks was the sole permit holder, and while normally taking artists and school kids for extended tours of the Musgrave Ranges, a cancellation created an opportunity for a small group of bushwalkers. While not cheap, this was ideal and in September we landed at Uluru. We were joined by three walkers from Adelaide, and a guy from Brisbane who were all also chasing the Eight. The Queenslander couldn't believe anyone else had thought of it. Compared to the others, Paul and I were very relaxed, it was our last peak and we were going to enjoy it.

Once again, the journey proved more rewarding than the climb. Ancient landscapes, hidden rock art and a meeting with the traditional owners filled the first day, and we fell asleep in our swags on a dry river bed, surrounded by shooting stars and wild donkeys.

The climb was over in a blink. We headed up a route plotted from the previous evening's recon, keeping between the ravines, heading more left once across the large saddle. A couple of cairns helped us through the cliffline and then we were on top – a bare 45 minutes

had passed. Having hardly raised a sweat, we decided to make a circuit by traversing on to the next peak in the range, then descending its ridge back to the base. I amused Paul greatly at one stage, losing my footing on the steep crossing and chest-planting a spinifex. There were so many spines sticking out of me, I had to change shirts, and I spent the rest of the trip with tweezers in hand.

What did we gain? A life full of amazing memories: the thrill of utter isolation alone on Zeil (the second time) as we looked out into the continent's dusty red heart; a profound love for Bogong, to which we make an annual pilgrimage, always hoping for a 'perfect storm'; an easy comradeship that requires no explanations; a million other unexplainable feelings and insights that helped shaped who we are; and a new respect for cutting compound number two.

Where to from here? Jon Krakauer once postulated that the planet's Seven Second Summits would be a much tougher proposal than the seven highest. Maybe Australia's second eight... Mt Bruce certainly has the goods on Meharry. 📍

Steve Waters spent his formative years travelling and hawking dubious IT skills, before maturing into longer walks, climbing, writing and hawking dubious photos. Favourite wild places are Tasmania, New Zealand and the Karakorum.

Australia's top eight

State	Peak	Height (metres)	Access (closest town/driver time from major city)
NSW	Mt Kosciuszko	2228	Thredbo/six hours from Sydney or Melbourne
VIC	Mt Bogong	1986	Tawonga/four hours from Melbourne
TAS	Mt Ossa	1617	Arm River Track/two hours from Devonport/Launceston
ACT	Mt Bimberi	1912	Canberra
QLD	Mt Bartle Frere	1622	One hour south of Cairns
WA	Mt Meharry	1253	Newman/ten hours from Perth
NT	Mt Zeil	1531	Two hours west of Alice Springs
SA	Mt Woodroffe	1435	Five hours south of Uluru (permit required)



Paul and the author (on right) on Bogong's Eskdale Spur in good weather.

Australia's second eight

State	Peak	Height (metres)
NSW	Mount Townsend	2209
QLD	Bellenden Ker	1593
VIC	Mount Feathertop	1922
NT	Mount Liebig	1524
WA	Mount Bruce	1235
SA	Mount Morris	1294
TAS	Ben Lomond	1570
ACT	Mount Gingera	1855

Amnye Machen

a sacred trek

Michael Stephens follows an ancient pilgrimage route through north-eastern Tibet

STANDING AT A DUSTY AND LONESOME crossroad, shadowed by looming peaks and the onset of rain, the taxi driver assured me we were at the start of the track. Listening to the drone of the taxi's engine fade back over the range we had come from, I was unconvinced. I couldn't help thinking that I'd made a big mistake.

I was deep in the Amnye Machen Mountains, a group of peaks in the Amdo region of north-eastern Tibet. Although the region lies in the modern Chinese province of Qinghai, the culture and tradition of the local Golok tribe has remained virtually untouched by China's more recent economic and social developments.

The main peak, Machen Gangri (6282 metres) is believed to be the residence of Tibet's most powerful guardian spirit, Machen Pomra. In Tibetan Buddhism, Machen Pomra is one of the nine gods who created the world. The pilgrimage circuit that skirts the base of the main range is an arduous 132 kilometres, and is one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Tibet.

The brief research I had done on the pilgrimage yielded little information. I knew that it was done in a clockwise direction (like all Tibetan pilgrimages) and that I would start from the south. I also found out that there would be a place to hire yaks and guides to take care of food and, well, guidance.

Reality saw no yak men and no food. My vague optimism was challenged by numerous doubts: I was alone, I had no map and I didn't speak the language.

Looking towards Machen Gangri, which can be seen just poking its summit over the ridge between Chenrezig (the main peak) and Dradul Lungshok, the low flat summit on the right. Jan Reurink



But I'd slogged for six days, riding on cramped buses, hitchhiking and even travelling on the back of a monk's motorbike to get to the start of this walk. Not to mention the last few hours riding in a taxi with some dubious character from Tselnak Kamdo, the nearest town. There was to be no turning back – so putting all uncertainties aside, I stepped across a small ravine to start the pilgrimage.

None of the barren desert harshness of central Tibet is found in the Amnye Machen Range. Instead, the region is covered by vast rolling hills inhabited by humble nomads and yaks. The Goloks are a nomadic Tibetan tribe, living in traditional yurt-style tents, which they move every few weeks to find new pastures for their yaks, sheep and goats.

In the warmer months of the year entire families, coming from all branches of Tibetan ethnicity, embark on the pilgrimage. It is said that a full circuit of Machen Gangri will appease the spirits, secure a healthy and prosperous future and generally fortify good karma.

After a short period of walking along a dirt road I came across a mudbrick house nestled into the side of the valley. Fuelled by curiosity and hunger I approached the house to find a very old woman and very young child gawking at me, as if I were from outer space. I understood their astonishment. Here was a young male with pale white skin, a hairless face, huge eyes and fair brown hair in the remote Amnye Machen Mountains, completely alone.

I motioned for food with the best hand signals I could muster and the old woman retreated into the home leaving me with the young lad, wide-eyed and looking absolutely petrified. I tried to ease the tension by rapping a tune on my metal bowl, to no reaction whatsoever. The woman reappeared with a plastic bag half filled with barley flour, and scooped a fist-sized chunk of yak butter into my bowl. In the other hand she carried a blackened pitcher of yak milk tea and poured it into my drink bottle. Combining these contents makes *tsampa*, a staple of the region and most of Tibet. The food is not cooked but kneaded by hand, creating a final taste and texture similar to unsweetened cookie dough.

After thanking the old woman profusely, I walked on up the valley along the dirt road. By the time I'd worked up a steady pace at an altitude of approximately 3200 metres, I came across the first group of pilgrims. Dressed in rags and covered in makeshift body armor, the pilgrims motioned for me to join them for tea. The reason for their strange outfits is the Tibetan act of prostration. Taking three steps and clasping hands above the head, the throat and the heart, they crouch down and lie face down on their belly. One final clasp of hands above the head is one prostration. These pilgrims were circumnavigating the mountain, prostrating the whole 132 kilometres, an arduous journey of two to three weeks. With smiles all round, I accepted a cup of milky tea and in broken hand signals tried to find out if I was on the right track.

I soon bade them good luck and farewell to rejoin the track. The weather seemed to be deteriorating, with large cloud bands lowering to the tops of the ranges. The region is snowbound for most of the year with temperatures plummeting to -40°C. Even in the warmer months it's common to get sun, sleet, snow, fog and rain all in the one day; this particular day was no exception.

On the second day of the walk, the dirt road degenerated into a vague footpath, linked by rock cairns built by countless Buddhist pilgrims over the generations. I trudged on a slight uphill gradient through steep gorge country, constantly crossing small tributaries. Nothing but the sound of flowing water accompanied me as I gradually felt the weight of the rising altitude.

Further along the track I heard a dog barking and noticed a black tent next to a small river. As I approached, a huge Tibetan mastiff did its best to wrench itself from its chain and tear me to pieces. A man in traditional Tibetan dress, including a colourful yak fur coat and semi-dreadlocked hair, screamed at the dog, bringing it back to its post and then welcomed me inside.

Once inside I was offered yak milk tea and a snack of cubes of stale bread. It seemed, once again, that foreigners were a rare sight on the route. Inside the nomad's tent his wife and two daughters were huddled around the cooking stove, with blankets and an assortment of cooking utensils strewn around the edges.

The Golok nomads are almost completely dependent on the yak. The cumbersome animal is the local dairy factory, producing milk, cheese, butter and yoghurt. It also provides textiles: material for



tents, rope, warm clothing and blankets. Fuel for the fire is sourced from yak dung heaped and dried in the sun. And further, the yak is also used to transport these nomadic people and their possessions to the next destination.

I camped next to the nomad's tent that night, with thunderheads making their way through the range at nightfall. Treated with sweetened yak yoghurt and countless cups of yak milk tea I hit the sack and fell straight to sleep.

Morning light revealed a bluebird day and a fresh dusting of snow on the upper slopes of the valley. It was perfect weather for attempting to cross the pass at 4664 metres, the highest stage of the circuit. So I packed my kit and after a few more obligatory cups of tea, bid farewell to my hosts. The route followed the valley on an increasing steep gradient. Eager to get a glimpse of Machen Gangri, I pushed on despite my heavy breathing.

Gradually gaining elevation my compass showed the valley now turning north, so I knew I should almost be at the pass. The isolation was really starting to hit me at this stage, being alone and unable to speak the local tongue made me think increasingly of home. What would people at home be doing now? What would I be doing if I were at home?



Clockwise from opposite, the Amnye Machen main range, with Machen Gangri (6282 metres) centre. 'Confused and wary'; the young shepherd with his rifle for protecting his flock from wolves, which left the author a little uneasy about camping alone in the high pass. Walking through fresh morning snow across Tamchok Gongkha Pass at 4664 metres. The local Golog pilgrims provide warm lodgings and hot tea when the temperature drops and the rain sets in. The Golog are heavily reliant on the yak for dairy goods, food, shelter and here, transport. All uncredited photos by the author



"I began by boiling some snow – my waterbottles were hard as rocks. Eager to get moving, I made a meal of tsampa and defrosted my socks in the cooking pot."

That's when I decided I'd climb the nearest peak. I set down my pack, grabbed some gloves, my trekking poles, a couple of muesli bars and set off up the slope. I felt light and strong without the burden of a heavy pack. Setting my eyes on the summit, I gained the ridgeline and pressed on. Slowly the valley dropped away and the gradient increased.

Nearly at the summit, having ascended almost 400 metres, I stopped in my tracks. Someone was up there. A little perturbed, I kept going and came upon a young shepherd looking over his flock of sheep. He seemed confused and wary. No doubt his anxiety was caused by my presence, not the 5000 metre elevation, hostile weather and isolation – which were all making me nervous. One question seemed to cloud his face – who the hell is this guy and what is he doing here? I offered him some of my muesli bar and he took it nervously. As we sized each other up I noticed a rifle slung over his shoulder. In primitive sign language I tried to ask what it might be for. He gritted his teeth and growled like a dog. I nodded and made a dog's barking sound. He frowned, shook his head ever so slightly and howled like a wolf. A wolf!

Heavy clouds prevented any sight of the main range. I decided to head on down, worried about developing altitude sickness from the

brisk ascent. A loose scree slope aided a fast descent, and I was soon heaving on my pack to attempt climbing the pass before dark.

As the gradient increased so did my breathing. My energy levels seemed to be draining faster than usual, and I had to stop every ten steps to breathe, hunkered over and coughing. The pass couldn't be much further and I knew the sight of Machen Gangri would lift my spirits, giving me the energy to make it through. The weather seemed to be improving, with glimpses of blue sky once again. To my delight, I could see on the horizon a mass of Tibetan prayer flags assembled around a large wooden pole – the sign of the highest point of the pass. As I ascended in the afternoon light, I could see down the valley from which I'd come, and the many other valleys that lead away from the main range. With energy levels dwindling, I stopped at a rocky outcrop for a feast of tsampa, although my staple meal was quickly losing its palatability. As the clouds lifted I could make out the highpoints of the main range and while trying to get through my bland meal without retching, Machen Gangri came into full view, towering over the valleys below.

One of the first foreigners to set eyes on the peak was American botanist Joseph Rock in 1939. He incorrectly measured the height of Machen Gangri at over 9000 metres, making the mountain for some time the world's highest peak. It actually comes in well short at 6282 metres and was unclimbed until 1981 (partly because an earlier Chinese expedition climbed the wrong peak). Another early Western visitor was the French adventurer, Fernand Grenard, who was impressed by: 'a prodigious and resplendent mass of snow and ice, which strikes any man, however accustomed to mountains, with admiration and astonishment.'

Walking through the afternoon sunlight I made camp under the watchful eye of Machen Gangri, soaring 1500 metres above me. With



Clockwise from top left, the spectacular Amnye Machen range. Reurink, Golop pilgrims take a rest by the track; their makeshift armour allows them to prostrate through mud, snow and high altitude passes for the entire 132-kilometre circuit. Looking across the Tamchok Gongkha La towards the main range and Machen Gangri.

the high Tibetan plain sprawled out in all its glory, I couldn't help feel an immense state of peace and accomplishment.

That night I remember hearing the patter of rain on the tent as another weather front passed through. By dawn I had to shuffle through a mound of fresh snow in the tent vestibule, only to find my boots and socks frozen solid. Looking outside revealed a new landscape covered in fresh snow. To the west lay snow covered peaks soaring above 6000 metres. To the east, massive rocky outcrops lit up by the morning sun glistened under the overnight dusting of snow. With clear blue skies above, it was bloody freezing. I began by boiling some snow – my waterbottles were hard as rocks. Eager to get moving, I made a meal of *tsampa* and defrosted my socks in the cooking pot.

It was difficult to navigate the snowy landscape, with all the rock cairns blanketed under the new snow. Heading in an easterly direction, skirting the northern slopes of the ranges I worried about getting lost. Nevertheless, before long the sun started to melt the night's snowfall and I managed to find a string of rock cairns showing the way down into the valley beyond the pass. With amazing views of Machen Gangri and her neighboring peaks, two curious vultures circled above, checking me out as I walked on.

Soon I joined a nomad herding his yaks down the valley, slowly transporting the family's possessions to the next camp.

By late afternoon, a group of four or five pilgrims had led me to a well-trodden path descending to a valley to the east. It was then that I knew that the hard part of the circuit was done. Walking in the shadow of the pilgrim group, I had a sense that I'd truly travelled back in time. With nothing but the sound of footsteps and yak bells, I walked on through the fading light on to tarmac and the hustle of a small town.

The pilgrim route continued on for another 70 kilometres on a dirt road and despite wishing to guarantee myself a life of happiness and good health – I had never felt so lonely. Being the novelty foreigner and walking above 4000 metres had taken its toll. So I found what seemed the most reasonable restaurant in town, ordered a massive bowl of noodles and considered my options.

By evening, I had managed to hitch a ride out of the mountains in a smoky old Landcruiser destined for the main highway back to Xining, central China. With Machen Gangri fading from sight under heavy cloud, I took one last look at the main range. 📍

Michael Stephens most recently managed to finish off a university degree while trekking around Borneo. His sights are now set on the open ocean, and he looks forward to sailing around the world with his new bride.

How to get there

Amnye Machen is one of the four main holy mountains of Tibet. It is located in Golop Tibet Autonomous Prefecture in the traditional Tibetan region of Amdo (Qinghai Province, China). The holy mountain attracts Tibetan pilgrims from all across eastern and northern Tibet during the northern summer months.

The closest major city is Xining, 2092 kilometres west of Beijing and best accessed by overnight train. From Xining it is a 440-kilometre journey south to the town of Dawu, the main access point for the trek. Guides and yaks are best sourced from travel agents in either Xining, Chengdu or Beijing, as English is hard to come by once in Dawu.

Crossing the

Warwick Sprawson searches for riches in the Great Dividing Range

THE CRY GOES UP EARLY.

'That's gold I tell you!'

'No, that's cheese,' my companion replies dryly.

'What about that? Eureka!'

'That's a banana. Just eat your lunch.'

We are on a smooth, green hillside overlooking the Victorian town of Bacchus Marsh, only a few kilometres into our walk on the Great Dividing Trail (GDT), and I'm already smitten with gold fever. Central Melbourne, from where we'd caught the train to the trackhead this morning, is clearly visible 40 kilometres away. I resume eating. We'd have plenty of opportunity to look for gold on our week-long, 140-kilometre walk to Castlemaine.

Our walk will be along two of the four sections that comprise the GDT, a total of 270 kilometres of tracks forming an inverted 'Y' centred on the beautiful old town of Daylesford, which links Castlemaine and Bendigo to the north with Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat to the south. Gold country, all of it, and – despite its proximity to Melbourne – much of it surprisingly wild.

After lunch we continue north along the well-marked track, the denuded hills around town relenting to the forest covered hills of the Lerderderg State Park. Although the ground is harsh and stony, the lowland forest we pass through has a stunning variety of flowering wattles and peas. The spring sunshine slants through the trees, lighting up tussock grass and illuminating the reddish new-growth of the eucalypts. The variety of birdlife in the 20, 500-hectare park is impressive too, with choughs, robins and gang-gang cockatoos examining us curiously. Despite this section of the GDT having been open for several years, walkers still seem to be a novelty (we only see a handful of other walkers all week, all of them utilising short sections of the track for day walks).

The scenery is beautiful, including stunning views of the 300-metre-deep Lerderderg Gorge that bisects the park to our east, but there's some steep sections for first-day legs, and we're grateful to make camp about 16 kilometres from Bacchus Marsh. Although there are four official campsites along the route, three with facilities (water and toilets), walkers need to be prepared to bush camp for at least a couple of nights.

After a reasonably wet spring we thought we

might be able to get a little water from the nearby Korkupenimul Creek. At first glance it appeared to only consist of a few small stagnant pools, but on closer inspection we were able to find a trickle of water, sufficient for cooking.

We set about preparing a simple dinner but soon realise that, with our early morning start, we'd forgotten to pack the fuel canister for the methylated spirits stove. An empty can of tuna makes a surprisingly good substitute. After eating we're asleep early enough to embarrass a six-year-old.

A glorious morning chorus of birds wakes us. Back on the track we briefly leave the forest's shelter to be buffeted by strong winds as we cross farmland and climb steeply – as in straight up – Mt Blackwood. At 736 metres the summit affords superb views back towards Melbourne and, more pleasantly, north over a sea of undulating green forest that we are yet to cross – the Wombat State Forest.

Back down among the trees, old goldmining activity starts to become more apparent with the remains of diggings: rusty iron, shards of thick glass and colourful fragments of pottery. We follow Square Bottle Track through a lovely glade of grass trees and low 'egg and bacon' shrubs towards Whiskey Creek. The miners who named these creeks and gullies in the 1850s must have been a thirsty lot as vodka, champagne, gin and rum all get a mention as placenames.

We descend steeply into Whiskey Creek where I'm hoping to find a single-malt on the rocks. Alas, although the rocks are there, the creek is dry. But it makes a perfect spot for lunch with heckling cockatoos wheeling overhead. Hobbling along on stiffened legs, we continue along the track until we reach O'Briens Road. Here we leave the track to descend the well-made dirt road for about three kilometres to the O'Briens Crossing campground.

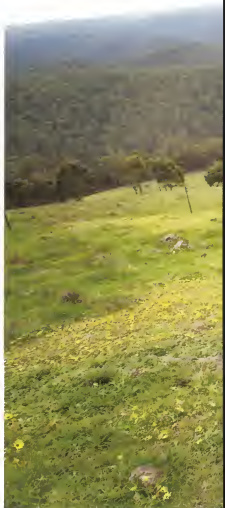
We manage to stay up slightly later, perhaps until about eight, when the murmur of the river and the cacophony of frogs lull us into another deep sleep.

In the morning I head to the river with my plate. 'I hope you're not going to wash your plate in the river', my companion says sternly. 'No, no', I say casually. 'It's already clean. Just taking it for a walk.'

To avoid ridicule I've learned to affect casualness about my gold-prospecting

activities. My plate is roughly the same shape as the mining pans they used in this very spot 150 years ago. I scoop up a plateful of river sand and swirl away the lighter grains – slowly, slowly, careful now, a little more – until I am finally left with... a very clean plate. Perhaps my technique needs a little refinement, or else the miners really did find every last skerrick of gold.

Leaving O'Briens we are relieved to avoid the long trudge up the road by taking a path behind the toilets that rejoins the GDT after about a kilometre. This section of the route, following the Lerderderg River to the hamlet of Blackwood, is one of the most beautiful on the track. A narrow path cut into the side of the wallaby grass-covered valley slopes down to the gently flowing river valley. The path follows the course of an old 'water race', a gutter like construction made by the miners to move water to normally dry areas. As water was essential for gold mining operations it was often shunted vast distances so it could be used in breaking-down gold-bearing earth. The area around



Divide



Above, Nic Learmonth and Chris Turnbull walking the Great Dividing Trail, crossing Mt Blackwood, with Lerderderg Gorge beyond. *Glenn Tempest*
Left, spring splendour—eucalypt leaves

the race, the local rock shaped to fit together like puzzle-pieces, an impressive feat of gold rush engineering. It could be the handiwork of a celebrated

character called Pauline Bonford, a Frenchwoman who defied the mores of her day to make a living building races, earning a reputation for enforcing her contracts with the back of her spine.

Next to the path a mineshaft leads into the hillside. The air temperature drops dramatically as we follow the head-high tunnel underground, and although we venture

as far as we dare, I fail to uncover any missed seams of gold.

Seven kilometres from O'Briens we reach the lawns and picnic tables of Blackwood Mineral Springs Reserve, a perfect place for a break. The springs are believed to have been discovered by Chinese miners during the sluicing of the riverbed and banks. Sluicing – the use of running water and a rifled wooden box to sieve earth – has left a legacy of eroded rivers throughout the goldfields. But the reserve is still a shady, pleasant place, one of the designated camping grounds on the GDT, with the springs still trickling beneath small protective rotundas. Although the waters are renowned for their health-giving properties, I am unable to enjoy them, as they taste like rusty radiator water.

Nowadays Blackwood is a quiet little town with its clutch of houses, including a few old log cabins, a pub and a general store, but in the mid-1850s it was a mining centre with a population of 13,000. The demand for timber

Blackwood was at the heart of a network of 150 kilometres of such races that follow the lay of the land like contour lines. They now make for ideal walking paths, a feature utilised for the bulk of the GDT (most other sections are along seldom-used four-wheel drive tracks).

As the path bends we can see the meticulous dry-stone buttressing supporting



for use in houses, mines and for firewood was so great that a royal commission in the 1890s described the Wombat forest as 'ruined'. Today, although many scars remain, the forest is substantially recovered, the old diggings blanketed by a dense layer of herbs, shrubs and trees.

After a dirt-road section where we encounter a noisy troupe of trail bikers, we leave the Lerderderg State Park and enter the Wombat, which we will stay in all the way to Daylesford, 36 kilometres distant.

We soon come to the former mining settlement of Simmons Reef, now home to the Garden of St Erth, an 1860's sandstone cottage surrounded by an exuberant exotic garden and fields of daffodils, as well as a nursery and cafe. We then enter another beautiful, narrow section of race along the Lerderderg, through damper forest of huge blackwood trees, sedges and tree ferns. Finally we come to our resting place for the evening, near Nolan Creek picnic ground, tucked amongst the lush forest at the junction of Nolan Creek and the upper Lerderderg. (Camping is permitted anywhere in the Wombat State Forest, although not within the Nolan Creek picnic ground as suggested in some of the GDT literature, as it is too close to the heritage-listed Lerderderg River.)

Our tuna tin cooker is still functioning well. We get a little crazy and stay up to a quarter past eight.

Heading out from camp early the next morning, the low sun illuminates the dense banks of flowering wattles and hakeas along the track. We take morning tea by a pair of large, stone chimneys, the most visible sign of an old Forest Commission camp, known colloquially as the 'Balt Camp', from the Baltic States origin of many of the refugees that worked here after the Second World War. These men, whatever their background – doctors, lawyers, electricians – were required to serve two years of forestry duties such as cutting firewood and road making in order to pay back the cost of their voyage; a tough welcome to a new home.

Towards Daylesford we pass through some sections of recently logged forest (logging still occurs in the Wombat, but under community management), notable for the lack of diversity of their regrowth. The closer to Daylesford we get, the more weeds we begin to see, until we



arrive at Lake Jubilee. The lake was constructed in 1860 to supply water to the local gold mines, but a subsequent bout of gold fever led to it being drained so further mining could be carried out. It's now a lake again, surrounded by a pleasant park with the caravan park by the shore just one of the many accommodation options Daylesford provides. After a 25-kilometre day we take the soft-option of a cabin with a hot shower.

With 50 per cent of the nation's known mineral water outlets, Daylesford and nearby Hepburn Springs have long been associated with the rejuvenating properties of their spring water. That tradition continues today with towns offering a plethora of options for stressed Melbourneans or tired walkers: day spas, massage, fine cuisine, cellar doors, galleries, boutiques and historic streetscapes. We content ourselves with a pizza and a bottle of wine.

Continuing on the GDT to the town's other picturesque artificial lake, Lake Daylesford, we then follow the winding Sailors Creek out into the sticks. Evidence of gold mining is everywhere: water races, pits, stone heaps, walls, boarded-up mines, even a section where miners had redirected the creek by blowing a hole through a rocky promontory to expose the creek bed for mining. Colourfully named gullies give a glimpse into a miner's life and humour: Linger and Die Gully, Christmas Gully, Humberg Gully, Keep It Dark Gully and Don't Wake Em Gully. There are plenty of rock pools that are sure to be great for a dip in summer, although they don't look too tempting on a cool, blustery spring morning.

A foraging echidna noses about on the side of the path, shunting great clods of earth aside with its powerful front legs as it jams its nose into the earth like a jack-hammer in pursuit of

ants. At various times along the GDT we also encounter kangaroos, swamp wallabies, a huge variety of birds and a single koala, resting comfortably in the fork of a tree, only rousing himself for a slow scratch.

The vegetation starts to subtly change to a drier mix of box type eucalypts that dominate the drier northern sections of the track. We also see some glorious candlebark trees, tall and smooth-trunked, their bark so pale as to be almost luminous in the dim light of the overcast day. The path again became lined with blackberry, gorse and broom, a fair indication that we're approaching Hepburn Springs. It

Above, left to right, Fryerstown history; 'Mechanics' was an old term referring to any skilled trade, such as plumbing. Walking a water race near Castlemaine on the Great Dividing Trail. Tempest. Surely a mirage? The chimneys of the chocolate mill mess-hall of 'Balt Camp'; a Forestry Commission workcamp for refugees. Below, get pampered in Daylesford, the town at the centre of the Great Dividing Trail.





begins to rain heavily, so we again take the soft option, checking into Continental House, a rambling old guesthouse with a vegan share-kitchen and pleasingly erratic colour scheme.

By the time we finish breakfast the gusty wind has blown the clouds away and sunshine plays on the water drops. Back on the track we pass more mineral springs near the Hepburn Springs Bathhouse, a 100-year-old complex currently undergoing renovations, then leave the town behind to climb into the surrounding hills through lean, desperate-looking box, peppermint and stringybark forest.

It's midmorning and we are just thinking about taking a break, and perhaps boiling up some water for a cuppa, when we stumble upon a weary walker's fantasy: a chocolate shop. A chocolate shop, deep in the woods.

The couple who own the Chocolate Mill, as the business is called, are a talented pair, for not only are they able to use Belgian chocolate and fresh local fillings to create delicate confections, but they also built the straw bale building the business is housed in. We savour

some hot chocolate and nibble on some chilli chocolate before taking their warming effects back out on to the track.

We follow the red clay Sawpit Road north through farmland, a rare stretch out of the cover of the forest. A fresh front brings a sudden plunge in temperature and a hammering of hail. For a brief moment the fields are covered with a layer of jagged white. It's so cold our breath is visible and we're forced to march rapidly with our hands thrust deep in pockets. To our west there are views of the pine-clad crater of Mount Franklin, an extinct volcano, and potential campsite for walkers (although it is a slight divergence from the track).

The road becomes a track and then we are back following narrow

water races through the forest. This area is also particularly abundant in mining relics and we see the remains of stone chimneys, walls, pottery and pits. From 1851 to 1854 the Castlemaine area was the world's richest shallow alluvial goldfield, a legacy now protected within the 7500-hectare Castlemaine Dry Diggings National Heritage Park. The density of the pits gives us some idea of the level activity this area must have experienced at the height of the rush.

We make camp in Browns Gully, a beautiful sheltered spot among manna gums, about 18 kilometres from Hepburn Springs. It is still relatively early so I have some quality prospecting time. As there is no water in any of the gullies I have to rely upon stumbling upon a nugget. I stumble upon various other things, like branches, logs and rocks, but the closest I come to finding a nugget is unearthing an ancient crushed can of Solo lemonade. Overnight the skies clear and we can see the stars among the waving trees.

Our final day on the track presents lots more mining relics, including rusty cans, bolts and machinery parts. A spider orchid appears beside the path, a prelude to the abundance of orchids that erupt closer to Castlemaine.

Descending to the Loddon River at Vaughan Springs we leave the dry, harsh hills and enter an oasis of shade and water. The weir where we cross has created a lovely swimming hole, and the reserve's toilets, water, barbecues and grassy banks make it a good place to camp. But we press on, up out of the Loddon valley and on to the surrounding flats with names that prove that plain names don't necessarily have to be plain: Chokem Flat, Murderers Flat and Deadmans Flat.

The route passes through Fryerstown, another former booming gold rush town, now a tiny village strung out around its grand gold rush era buildings such as the red brick Burke and Wills Mechanics Institute.

Seven kilometres from Castlemaine we come across 'The Monk', a rocky hill alive with orchids and wildflowers. Bright yellow yam daisies, purple waxlip orchids and the blotched golden flowers of leopard orchids all in the most incredible profusion – enough to drive a plant-nerd into a frenzy.

As we begin our long slow descent along Poverty Gully race into the grand old town of Castlemaine I'm finally content to stop looking for gold. 🍌

Warwick Sprawson is mad-keen on writing and walking and his first book, *The Complete Overland Track*, has given him the chance to do both. The full-colour guidebook to Tasmania's iconic walk includes plants, birds, animals, maps, history, geology and track notes. It will be released in September 2010 by Red Dog Books.

The walk at a glance

Grade: Apart from a few brief very steep sections, particularly leaving Bacchus Marsh and climbing Mt Blackwood, the walk is easy to moderate

Length: Six to eight days, from Bacchus Marsh to Castlemaine

Distance: 140 kilometres

Type: Varies from the damper messmate-peppermint forests of the south to the drier box-ironbark forest of the north. Different sections are dominated by grevilleas, wattles, native grasses and hebeas

Start finish: Bacchus Marsh to Castlemaine (although the walk can be completed in either direction). One of the best features of the walk is that trains are available at either end

Maps: The *Lerderderg Track* map (from Bacchus Marsh to Daylesford \$8.50) and the *Dry Diggings Track* map (Daylesford to Castlemaine \$11.95) produced by the Great Dividing Trail Association have the route marked on them and provide distances and points of interest. They are available online from the Great Dividing Trail Association (www.gdt.org.au) or from the Ballarat, Bendigo, Blackwood, Castlemaine and Daylesford Tourist Information Centres

Highlights: In spring the wildflowers are stunning, particularly the orchids around The Monk near Castlemaine

Special: Water is unavailable on some sections of walk, particularly between Bacchus Marsh and O'Briens Crossing and between Hepburn Springs and Vaughan Springs. The GDT has good access by road and is therefore also suited to shorter walks. A little reading up on the history of the goldfields may increase your enjoyment of the walk.

Southern Scapes

Tasmania's beautiful places photographed by Michael Walters



A view of the Tarnshelf, Mt Field National Park.





Top to bottom, one of the majestic tall hardwoods that is endangered by logging in the Wielangta State Forest. A fagus plant during snow falls in Tarnshelf, Mt Field National Park. Strickland Falls, at the bottom of Mt Wellington. Right, the wild west coast of the Tarkine at sunset.

Michael Walters spent most of his childhood walking and fishing throughout Tasmania. It wasn't until four years ago that he first started using a camera and quickly fell in love with photography and capturing Tasmania's beautiful places.





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Filmstrip photo credits top down:

From the film 'Flowing the Atlantic', 'Kranked Revolve Photo by Dylan Dunkerton, From the film 'Revolution One', 'Birdman of the Karakorum', photo by Alun Hughes, 'Alone on the Wall' climbing shot, from the film 'Deep Shredded'

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Tropical Tracks

Five great walks in Far North Queensland

Words Catherine Lawson and Photos David Brislow

Crossing Slaty Creek gave us the chance to cool our heels and pluck off a layer of leeches en route to Cedar Bay.

THROUGH VAST TRACTS OF WORLD

Heritage-listed wilderness, along ancient Indigenous foot tracks and beneath towering fan palms, tropical walkers are spoilt for choice when they strap on their boots. In Far North Queensland, overnight adventures don't get much tougher than the eight-hour walk into remote Cedar Bay National Park or the rugged Djljgarrin Track through the Misty Mountains behind Mission Beach. Close to Cairns, day-trippers test their metal on the rigorous climb to Kahlpahlim Rock and along Barron Gorge's Speewah Circuit. There are plenty of gentler tracks too that set out from easily accessed trailheads located right across the far northern wet tropics, from Townsville to Cooktown.

When to go

Fewer rain showers and cooler temperatures make Far North Queensland's winter dry season ideal for bushwalking. From April to October, daytime temperatures reach between 25–29°C along the coast and are cooler inland. Avoid the balmy, summer wet season.

Further information

The *Tropical Walking Tracks* series by Kym Dungey and Jane Whytlaw contains useful information

on many routes. For general national park information, visit www.epa.qld.gov.au or www.wetttropics.gov.au

The walks

Kahlpahlim Rock, Dinden National Park

Shaping a formidable backdrop that tempers Cairns' rapid urban sprawl, steep, rainforested spurs lead to eucalypt-covered ridgelines and provide an escape for weekend walkers.

Accessed by Kuranda in Dinden National Park, Kahlpahlim Rock juts out from Lambs Head, the highest point on the rugged Lamb Range at around 1300 metres. The rock's two pinnacles provide exceptional ocean views but this walk doesn't give them up without a real workout. Two rough routes lead to the top: one, a steep, scenic pathway up rainforested gullies, ascending through stands of purple kauris, casuarina scrub and eucalypt forests of rose gum and turpentine. The shorter, steeper option is the Ridge Track – a tough grunt up a dry, exposed spur that is best reserved for the downhill retreat from the rock. Together, they form a strenuous, daylong circuit through incredibly diverse vegetation that rewards with great views and solitude.

From the signposted Kahlpahlim trailhead, set out along an overgrown logging road, cross

the creek and begin an easy ascent beside a small stream. After 25 minutes, the track descends to a log crossing over a sandy stream. At the junction, turn left up a steep hill. After five minutes, the track passes an incredibly burlt eucalypt on the left-hand side and dips to a small creek crowded with spectacular *oraniopsis* palms. This is the last reliable water source on the track.

Beyond the creek, begin the long, steep climb up the hill face to access the summit ridge. After ten minutes, the gradient levels out as the track passes through a stand of purple kauris, then ascends again along a gradually narrowing track for 30 minutes to meet a flagged track that leads directly up the ridge. Follow this for ten minutes around large granite boulders to reach the junction of three tracks: the Ridge Track that descends to the west and the Kahlpahlim Ridge Track that ascends to the summit.

Follow orange markers and flagging tape up Kahlpahlim Rock ridge to reach a sheer rock face and a junction marker (two orange arrows pointing to each other) after 30 minutes.

Push your way through the scrub on your right to reach a boulder that overlooks the Atherton Tablelands. Back at the junction marker, descend between the rock face and a large boulder on the left to reach an overhung shelter.

Here, flagging tape leads confusingly in two directions. Stay close to the rock face on your right and climb up and into the chasm. Within minutes you'll emerge on to a large granite dome covered with colourful alpine plants. This is a great lunch spot overlooking Cairns and Lake Morris.

From the lookout, the summit lies about 20 minutes away. Walk a few metres into the scrub directly behind the dome and look immediately to your left for the flagging tape that indicates the unlikely route below. Lower yourself into the cleft and remove your pack to squeeze through the awkward space between a small tree and a boulder. The track winds beneath stunning, moss-covered rock faces on your left, and then ascends a steep gully to reach the narrow saddle. Flagging tape leads right to a lookout offering views to the west, and left to the summit, marked by a communications tower, a helipad and a small rainwater tank that is for emergency use only.

To descend, return to the saddle and scramble directly down the steep gully, watching for flagging tape. This more direct return route curls in a broad arc beneath the lookout boulders, forcing you to crawl under fallen trees before rejoining the track off Kahlpahim Rock.

About 40 minutes after leaving the summit, the three-track junction appears. Follow the Ridge Track that gently descends through eucalypt forest.

After 40 minutes, the track steepens and narrows as rainforest species and thorny patches of wait-a-while appear. At times following an overgrown logging track, the track eventually levels out into grasslands. Beware of snakes along this section.

The masses of lantana herald that the end is near and about 90 minutes from the track junction, you hit the gravel. Turn left and walk along the road for 2.2 kilometres to retrieve your vehicle.

Distance: 12.2 kilometres/five hours

Grade: Strenuous

Nearest Towns: Mareeba/Kuranda

Start/Finish: Kahlpahim Track car park

Access: From Kuranda, follow the Kennedy Highway for 21 kilometres to the signposted turn-off to Davies Creek National Park. A corrugated track leads for 14 kilometres through the park to Kahlpahim trailhead at the end of the road.

Map: Sunmap 1:50 000 8063.4 *Tinaroo*

Camping: Dinden National Park has six bush campsites (\$4.85/person/night). Pre-book online at www.epa.qld.gov.au or by phoning 131 304. Self-registration camping is available in nearby Davies Creek National Park.

Safety/warnings: This rugged track has steep sections and some scrambling and climbing is required. Carry plenty of water and protect against leeches and wait-a-while

Home Rule to Cedar Bay, Cedar Bay (Mangkal-Mangkalba) National Park

Blissfully deserted and accessible only to walkers and boats, Cedar Bay's coconut-fringed lagoon nuzzles against the rugged Mt Finlayson Range. Located east of the dusty Bloomfield Track that follows the coast between Cape Tribulation and Cooktown, the bay demands some determination to reach.

Setting out from the privately-owned Home Rule Rainforest Lodge (and campground) on the banks of Wallaby Creek, it takes a full day to walk the 15.5 kilometres of overgrown logging tracks and donkey tracks that wind over the range through old tin mining camps and finally descend to Cedar Bay.

The track begins behind Home Rule's trio of dams. For the first hour, follow the broad logging track that leads across Wallaby Creek and ascends a steep ridge.

Sidestepping feral pig wallows, descend the orange, muddy track beneath *licuala*

ramsayi fan palms and tree ferns. Here, the track narrows and trees felled by cyclones make route finding difficult. Where the track seems obliterated by fallen trees and a vast maze of thorny lawyer cane, look for the strands of tattered flagging tape that pepper the path through the rainforest. Often they will be found attached to fallen branches or on the forest floor.

After crossing Slaty Creek, the track follows the water to the junction of Slaty and Granite Creeks, then meanders around giant granite boulders and climbs a rugged path to Black Snake Rocks at 480 metres. This clearing beside Granite Creek is a good spot to rest.

On re-entering the forest, the remnants of tin mines dug in the 1870s can be found scattered trackside. Near the top of the range, water-diverting channels crisscross a clearing where abandoned campsites are gradually being reclaimed by the forest.

It was here that we heard and briefly spotted a rare Bennett's tree kangaroo that dropped swiftly from the canopy and disappeared.

The descent to Cedar Bay follows an impossibly steep spur that slips precariously over mossy tree roots. The route is somewhat moderated by a series of switchbacks, carved by the old tin miners and navigated by the packhorse teams that carried supplies into and ore out of the camps. Eventually, the track levels out and crosses Ashwell Creek to reach the long-deserted camp of Cedar Bay Bill, aka William Yale Evans, a hermit tin miner whose nautilus shell-covered monument overlooks the beach.

Top up water supplies at the creek before completing the short stroll to the bay and a number of cleared campsites in the dunes further south.

From left to right, our beachfront Cedar Bay campsite. A giant tree fern. A huge trackside kauri on the Speewah Circuit. A rewarding four hour circuit leads to magnificent pools along Stoney Creek.



Distance: 15.5 kilometres/seven to eight hours

Grade: Strenuous

Nearest Town: Cooktown

Start/Finish: Home Rule Rainforest Lodge

Access: The lodge is signposted from Rossville, 53 kilometres south of Cooktown via the unsealed Cooktown-Bloomfield Road (suitable for conventional vehicles)

Maps: Tropical Walking Tracks (Port Douglas, the Daintree & Cooktown) by Dungey and Whytlaw or Sunmap 1:50 000 7966.2 Ayton

Camping: Pay for bush camping sites (\$4.85 per person) in advance at an EPA office. Use fuel/gas stoves and remove all rubbish

Safety/warnings: Wear a long-sleeved shirt and pants to protect against lawyer cane and leeches. Marine stingers inhabit the water from October to May (never swim) and saltwater crocodiles may dwell in estuaries, so avoid crossing tidal creeks at high tide and never swim in them

canopies of enormous strangler figs and, together with immense flocks of lorikeets, lead the way to Elizabeth Grant Falls. A long, single-drop cascade tumbling 300 metres into Koolmoon Creek, the waterfall surges in the wet season when it's worth tackling the easy four-kilometre return side trip to reach a lookout opposite.

After taking in the waterfall views, retrace your steps to a signpost marked by two magnificent strangler figs, woven into an archway high above the track. Here, a short, steep descent brings you to Koolmoon Creek, where you can replenish water supplies for the four to five-hour walk to Walters Waterhole.

Across the creek, the gruelling ascent to the top of the range begins with a scramble along steep, precarious switchbacks. When the switchbacks end, continue directly up over loose ground to a narrow ridge high above the creek, dodging lawyer cane, fallen trees and steaming mounds of bright red cassowary scat. At the top of the ridge, the track traverses a saddle, then begins a series of ascents and descents on to another, broader ridge. When it eventually levels out, the track merges with old logging tracks across gentler ground, passing remnants of giant red cedars and loggers' camps.

At the turn-off to Walters Waterhole, there are a couple of spacious campsites along the fire track.

The waterhole lies another 1.5 kilometres on, a tranquil series of deep, green pools that drop dramatically over sheer rock walls and disappear into the dense rainforest downstream. There is little flat ground around the waterhole and bivvying on the broad, fat rock slabs riverside, as we did during the dry season, is not advisable during the wet. From January to March, sudden downpours are unpredictable and can rapidly produce flash floods. The return route is easier, but use caution in tackling the dizzying descent down the ridge to Koolmoon Creek. From the creek, it's a short scramble up the slope and an easy stroll to the trailhead at Cochrane Creek.

Distance: 31 kilometres return/overnight

Grade: Strenuous

Nearest Town: Tully

Start/Finish: Cochrane Creek Campground

Access: Tully lies 150 kilometres south of Cairns. From the town centre, follow Tully Gorge Road, take the signposted turn-off to Cochrane Creek and continue for nine kilometres to its end

Camping: Book campsites by phone (131 304) or online at www.epa.qld.gov.au

Cochrane Creek campground has a composting toilet and picnic shelters. Boil river water before drinking

Safety/warnings: Tully has an average annual rainfall of 4490 millimetres, so prepare for rain at any time of the year

Speewah Circuit, Barron Gorge National Park

On the Kuranda Range beyond Cairns, the controversial Sky Rail delivers a steady stream of tourists to the edge of a canyon where the Barron River plunges 265 metres.

Just ten kilometres away, however, in a protected pocket of rainforest in Barron Gorge National Park, the tracks that radiate from Speewah campground see very little foot traffic.

Linking tracks blazed by explorers Douglas and Smith in the 1870s and ancient

Indigenous pathways, the Speewah Circuit provides a shady walk through rainforest, along dry eucalypt ridgelines and across clear, cool streams.

From Speewah campground, set out along the Djina-wu track, an easy path that crosses two seasonal streams over bridges and undulates up and down for 765 metres.

At the first track junction, head right along Smiths Track and gradually, then steeply ascend a spur for 1.4 kilometres to a T-junction with an old logging road.

Watch out for wait-a-while in this section.

Turn left, pass through the national park gate

Djilgarrin Track, Misty Mountains World Heritage Area

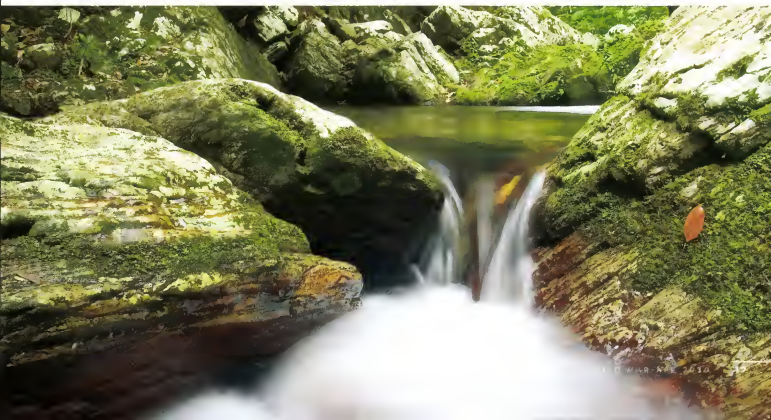
In the Misty Mountains west of Mission Beach, Tully and Innisfail, walkers can explore a 130-kilometre network of bushwalking tracks.

One of the more challenging routes, the Djilgarrin Track follows centuries-old logging tracks and ancient foot tracks forged by the MaMu and Jirbal peoples between the mountains and the sea.

A day on this strenuous track is spent ascending overgrown slopes, fighting through tangles of lawyer cane and routinely plucking off either bush ticks or leeches or both. But there are fine distractions too: deep rock pools, chilly streams and striking waterfalls.

Access the track from Cochrane Creek's walk-in campsite, signposted 50 kilometres west of Tully.

Beyond the creek, follow the broad fire track that rises gently, carpeted with fallen cluster figs and bright orange buds. Flying foxes commonly roost along this stretch, staking out the





and enjoy a gradual one-kilometre descent along the broad track to arrive at Cadaji Corner after 20 minutes. Stay on the logging track (now renamed Yalbugie Track) as it winds beneath giant tree ferns on the descent to Fern Creek, 950 metres away. Cross the creek and climb up and around Yalbugie Hill.

At the next signposted junction, leave the logging track and make a swift descent through rainforest to reach a huge, trackside kauri pine. Continue the descent to Stoney Creek, where butterflies flit amongst the fig trees and, upstream of the crossing, small cascades fill a clear, broad swimming hole. Rockhop across the creek to an orange marker, climb the steep hill, and then descend around a tree fall (look for the orange marker). Cross a small stream

and make a stiff ascent to Tobys Lookout. Although overgrown, the lookout provides glimpses of the Coral Sea and Glacier Rock across Stoney Creek Gorge.

Beyond the lookout, follow the grassy ridgeline west and zigzag back down a steep, narrow path to the confluence of Stoney and Fern Creeks. Off the track and 100 metres downstream lies Stoney Creek Falls – a short drop over a steep granite lip to a swimming hole far below.

Across the creeks, the track leads directly up a spur above the falls, levelling out after 15–20 minutes at the junction with the Gandal Wandun Track. Turn right here on to a gentle track where stout trees growing on the steep western side of the track have escaped the old loggers' saws. Another 25 minutes later, at the junction with the Douglas Track, turn left and follow the gentle pathway across streams back to the campground, 2.8 kilometres away.

Distance: 13 kilometres/four hours

Grade: Moderate

Nearest Town: Kuranda

Start/Finish: Speewah Campground

Access: From Kuranda, follow the Kennedy Highway for six kilometres, turn left on to Speewah Road, and after 3.2 kilometres, left again on to Stoney Creek Road. Beyond the bridge, turn left on to Smiths Track (Road) to reach the campground.

Map: Sunmap 1:25 000 8064-32 Redlynch

Camping: Self-register on arrival at Speewah Campground (\$4.85/person/night); free gas BBQs, water and a cold shower provided.

Safety/warnings: Apply insect repellent to deter ticks and leeches, and watch for wait-a-while

Split Rock Circuit, Laura

The Quinkan galleries around Laura, west of Cooktown, are internationally renowned, ranked by UNESCO as one of the world's top ten rock art areas. While few of the galleries are open to the public, at Split Rock an adventurous, circuit track leads walkers up a sandstone bluff to overhangs adorned with

Clockwise from left, Quinkan art at Split Rock.

The easy Split Rock Circuit track winds beneath sandstone outcrops. The author taking a break on the Kahlpahlim Trail in the Dindrie National Park. The view from the lookout above Split Rock.

totem animals, the mysterious Quinkans, and engravings estimated to be at least 13 000 years old. The track climbs to the top of an escarpment, elevating walkers above high plateaus weathered into a maze of narrow ranges, spurs and rounded hilltops, then returns through Guguyalangi Gallery – a magnificent maze of rock outcrops painted with ochre murals. Split Rock was 'discovered' in 1960 by road builders clearing a pathway to the tip of Cape York Peninsula. While undoubtedly imperilled by its roadside location, it is one of the most accessible Indigenous art sites in the north and the only Quinkan site that can be toured independently.

Facilities at the site are limited to an information shelter, toilet, shaded picnic tables and a box where visitors can deposit the requested access fee of \$5 per adult. From the information shelter, a short, steep track leads up towards the base of the escarpment to a track junction beneath a large rock. Head left for 100 metres to Split Rock gallery where an overhang protects paintings of totem animals: a red dingo, garfish, turtle, an echidna, along with kangaroos tracks and human figures, many superimposed over older layers of paint.

From Split Rock, walk south-east along the track to the Flying Fox gallery, named for the group of flying foxes depicted hanging upside down on the small rock wall. Another 100 metres on is the Tall Spirits gallery, where six thin, ancestral spirit figures are visible. These are the friendly 'Quinkans' who inhabit the sandstone bluffs. Beyond Tall Spirits you'll encounter a 'No Unauthorised Access' sign on the track that continues up on to the plateau.




The manager of Laura's cultural and information centre gave us this curious explanation: the sign is there to discourage unfit walkers from continuing on, but he happily handed us a mud map of the walk and encouraged us to explore.

Ascend the stone stairs that climb 180 metres up on to the eastern edge of the escarpment, winding between large boulders en route. After 20 minutes, the rough track reaches a lookout that provides broad views to the south.

The track forks beyond the lookout. Continue along the escarpment edge to Turtle Rock, or turn right and climb immediately up on to the plateau. Both tracks eventually link and form a well-trodden footpath across the top of the grassy plateau. This easy, pleasant stroll leads past old termite mound ovens. Decaying signs, flagging tape and painted arrows mark the way and after 30 minutes, the track descends off the western end of the escarpment to reach Guguyalangi Gallery, the largest and most complex art site.

Follow the track as it winds around rock outcrops where overhangs protect huge canvasses and countless small caves, some just a few feet high, adorned with tiny paint-blown hands. On one wall, a human figure stands beside three scrub turkeys. Further on, male and female figures are crowded together, painted sideways and upside down and some depicted with oversized penises (often an indication of sorcery or magic).

There are catfish, animal tracks and yams, and on one wall behind a row of three termite mound ovens, a series of paint-blown hands is clearly visible at least six metres off the ground. At the eastern end of the Guguyalangi Gallery, a well-defined pathway leads down the escarpment along a rocky, stepped track to rejoin the route back to the carpark. 

Catherine Lawson and David Bristow live to walk, sea kayak and snorkel some of Australia's most distant wild places. They are currently sailing their *Tiki* 31 catamaran across the Top End from Cairns to Broome.



Distance: Four kilometres/2.5 hours

Grade: Easy

Nearest Town: Laura

Start/Finish: Split Rock car park

Access: Split Rock is located 54 kilometres north of Lakeland on the Peninsula Development Road. The road is partly sealed, but fine for conventional vehicles in the dry winter months. Check road conditions with Cairns RACQ before setting out (phone 1300 130 595)

Camping: Camp at the Laura Roadhouse (from \$5/person) or behind the Quinkan Hotel (from \$8/person). Bush campsites at Lakefield National Park, 27 kilometres north of Laura, cost \$4.85/person (BYO water)

Maps: See Dungey and Whytlaw's *Tropical Walking Tracks*. Pt Douglas, the Daintree & Cooktown



Macalister

(and Son of a Bitch)

Spur

**Glenn van der Knijff outlines an exciting circuit walk
traversing wild peaks and ridges in the upper
Macalister River region of the Victorian Alps**



Anyone who has walked over the wonderful summits of Mt Clear and High Cone will have noticed the big, brooding, Macalister Spur curving like a pointed finger away from the main divide. This mighty spur – trackless and remote for its entire length – descends into the mysterious depths of the Macalister River valley.

These notes take walkers on a journey of discovery over Mt Clear and along this wild ridge to the Macalister River, before climbing back to the crest of the Great Dividing Range. There are a number of possible return routes from the Macalister River valley, but the one described here first crosses into the Barkly River valley before climbing the evocatively

named Son of a Bitch Spur to reach Mt McDonald. The Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT) is then followed to the Nobs before returning to the starting point in the Clear Creek valley.

This is a route of great variation; superb views are a highlight, beautiful snow gum and alpine ash forests are common and there's some wild terrain to keep you enthralled. This four-day circuit is suited best to experienced walkers, as it involves demanding walking as well as some easy strolling along fire tracks. While mostly of a moderate grade, the nature of the walking – which includes some off-track sections requiring navigation skills and some steep ascents – warrant the hard rating.

Late afternoon light on Mt McDonald, with Mt Clear visible in the middle background, Alpine National Park, Victorian Alps. All photos by the author



If you wanted to extend this walk even further, as a suggestion you could merge this route with the one described in 'Victorian high peaks of the Great Divide' (Wild no 101) to create an excellent, but challenging, five- or six-day walk.

When to go

Snow covers the peaks during winter, so the warmer months from late spring through to April/May are best for walking. While the weather is usually fine and warm through summer, you should always be prepared for cold and wet conditions that can develop quickly. Wildflowers grow in abundance in early summer, particularly on the peaks and higher ridges.

Maps

Coverage of the walk area is by the *Moroka* (formerly named *Tamboritha-Moroka*) 1:50 000 map, and the all new *Skene* 1:50 000 map published by Viemaps.

Access

From Mansfield, drive along the Mt Buller Road. After about 20 kilometres turn right on to Howqua Track shortly beyond the small village of Merriqui. Follow this gravel road through Sheepyard Flat camping area, where the road narrows and changes name to Brocks Road. Eventually you'll reach a three-way road junction at Eight Mile Gap, 57 kilometres from Mansfield. Turn right and descend into the Jamieson River valley. A short way up the valley you'll pass the Low Saddle Road turn-off, but continue for a further three kilometres on Brocks Road to where Clear Creek Road veers off to the right. About 500 metres up Clear Creek Road is a grassy camping area on the left, adjacent to Clear Creek.

Safety/warnings

These notes were researched in November 2006, just prior to the major bushfires that swept through the region. Forest and track conditions are likely to have changed in some areas as a result, so bear this in mind when following these notes. Also, the first night's campsite isn't near a stream so you'll need water bags to carry water for the last few kilometres from the water source.

The walk

Clear Creek Road continues up the valley for 1.5 kilometres to a decommissioned bridge, halting further vehicular access. (The *Moroka* map shows a shortcut track, heading east-south-east away from the main track, about one kilometre from the Brocks Road turn-off. Don't try to follow this track as it's heavily overgrown and difficult to locate.) Collect water here and stroll along the fire track as it zig-zags up the hillside, eventually reaching a

saddle bordering a grove of alpine ash. The route climbs higher and passes through a few more saddles before reaching open snow gum forest, interspersed with small plains, on the crest of a broad ridge. After heading east for a few kilometres the track reaches the foot of the northern summit of Mt Clear at yet another saddle; this location is easily identifiable as the track skirts the northern face of Mt Clear past this point. Though only a half-day walk from the start, it's possible to camp at this pleasant spot as water is available 500 metres to the south along an old vehicle track. (The track isn't obvious in the saddle, but once located it leads to the reliable headwater of Clear Creek.)

However, to shorten the second day's walk, it is recommended that you collect water from the creek mentioned above and camp on Mt Clear itself. Instead of following the track as it sidles to the north of Mt Clear, from the saddle strike out east away from the track and up a spur towards the northern summit of Mt Clear. There is some light scrub as you climb, but higher up the snow gum forest opens up and affords excellent views. The narrow ridge forming Mt Clear's northern summit has limited camping opportunities, but once you reach the AAWT on the ridgetop, stroll south for 400 metres to reach a wide saddle about 600 metres north of Mt Clear itself. There is already an established campsite among the scattered woodland at this pretty locale and views are plentiful.



Right, evening at a campsite on the southern summit of the Nobs.

Below, Stephen Hamilton drinking his fill from the Macalister River, right at the base of the Macalister Spur. **For right**, a walker on Macalister Spur, not far from the knoll called Toms Cap.



conditions. There is little scrub initially but as you descend the undergrowth makes walking increasingly tedious. About 1.5 kilometres from the summit of Square Top the route passes through a small snow plain. Continue south-east through the forest and soon the route descends more steeply, eventually reaching the narrow spine of the Macalister Spur. (Be careful not to walk east from the small snow plain, as you may end up at the head of spur that descends steeply east away from the Macalister Spur.)

The Macalister Spur is easy to follow for sometime as it swings around to the south, although there is no track. After passing through a few small plains and over a couple of knolls the route crosses Toms Cap (1394 metres), a prominent high point along the ridge. The route continues south-west from Toms Cap down the spur – wide at this point – and the snowgum forest is quite thick so a compass may be necessary to stay on the correct course. (Avoid the urge to head south from Toms Cap, otherwise you'll end up on the wrong spur and will need to backtrack.)

About 500 metres from Toms Cap the spur opens up into a large grassy plain, dotted with snow gums. Beyond the plain the route undulates south-west then south through forest again until you reach an obvious knoll. The route briefly plummets from this point then eases as the spur levels off again, where some confusing undulations make route finding a little difficult. Take care to stay on the main spur as you head south, climbing a little to a 1063-metre highpoint. A faint footpath continues south-west and follows the spur into the depths of the Macalister River valley. The spur divides as it nears the valley floor, take the minor spur heading more west

than south and this will bring you to the riverbank.

In the valley, the tranquil waters of the Macalister reflect the mountainsides and refreshing afternoon breezes waft lazily along the valley, much to a walker's appreciation on a hot day. Cross the river and locate the overgrown northern extension of the Macalister River Track. The track is difficult to follow, particularly where it is overgrown with blackberries, but 500 metres downstream the track crosses the river to the west bank and improves considerably. A short way south of the crossing and off to the left is a small campsite. A much larger campsite, albeit a little dusty and slightly less 'wild', is two kilometres further downstream where the Butcher Country Track intersects the Macalister River Track. There is an excellent wading pool here with a small waterfall.

Day Three

From the waterfall campsite, head back up the Macalister River Track for one kilometre to a river crossing. Collect water here. A few hundred metres north of the crossing leave the track and walk due west into the forest; again, there is no track. The route climbs on to a ridge, which climbs steadily west towards Basalt Knob. The scrub is light and route finding is easy. Near the top a few small bluffs interrupt the spur, but these are easily navigable and shouldn't prevent any problems, though care must be taken. The ascent ends on the boulder- and tree-covered summit of Basalt Knob (1269 metres). Views are unfortunately limited, although there are better ones from the upper portion of the spur.

Day two

There is no water between Mt Clear and the Macalister River, so you must carry enough to see you through the descent of the Macalister Spur (at least five hours).

Warm up in the morning with an easy walk along the faint AAWT to the wide summit plateau of Mt Clear (1695 metres), adorned with a small cairn. This is the highest point of the walk. The open summit is crowned by small rocks typical of other peaks in this area, including King Billy No 1 and No 2 to the north. This is the last great vantage point for some time, so absorb the expansive views over the surrounding ranges and valleys before continuing south and descending quite steeply into the deep saddle between Mt Clear and Square Top.

A short but sharp climb up a grassy slope brings you to Square Top (1587 metres). As the name suggests, the summit is quite flat. Views are obscured by forest so once on top bear south-east away from the main footpath and strike out along the ambiguous crest of the Macalister Spur; a compass may be required along this section, particularly in foggy

Head south-west from Basalt Knob through thick alpine ash forest for 400 metres to reach Bull Plain Road. This quiet dirt road heads generally north-west just below the crest of Bull Plain Spur. The road soon climbs on to Mountain Ash Spur and sidles the west side of Mountain Ash Top (1333 metres) before descending to the forested Grimme Saddle, eight kilometres from Basalt Knob.

Follow the road beyond the saddle for 600 metres to where an old and overgrown fire track descends from the west side of the road. This rough track leads steadily down to a fire track and bridge over the east branch of the Barkly River. (If this overgrown track is missed, continue on Bull Plain Road as it winds north into the valley, then follow a fire track south to reach the bridge.)

Collect water at the bridge (beware of leeches) before continuing south-west up the fire track to reach a saddle and track junction on Son of a Bitch Spur. Camp at the junction, although there are no grassy sites. There may be better campsites south along Son of a Bitch Spur, if you want to investigate further, but north along the spur there are few options.

Day four

You'll need water for the day so stroll 900 metres down a fire track to the west branch of the Barkly River to collect your supply.

From the campsite head north along a fire track, which closely hugs the crest of Son of a Bitch Spur. The track climbs increasingly steeply until it crosses a 1392-metre hill from where you can see Mt McDonald invitingly close to the north. The track drops to a saddle then undulates for a little over one kilometre until it passes through a shallow saddle where the track begins its descent to the east. Depart the track at this saddle and walk north into the snow gum forest and on to a broad spur. There is no track, and the spur is quite scrubby (particularly lower down), but simply walk up the steep hillside for one kilometre until you reach the indistinct AAWT on the eastern summit of Mt McDonald. Leave your packs here and walk west up to Mt McDonald (1620 metres), 700 metres away. There are fine views to be had from many places along the spine of the rocky ridge, particularly to the north over the upper Jamieson River valley.

Collect your packs and descend generally east along the AAWT, which keeps close to the rocky ridge crest most of the time. Small cairns help to show the route in some areas. About two kilometres from the summit, atop a small hill, the AAWT veers east, descends away from the prominent ridge and soon improves into an old fire track. The grade eases as you reach a saddle at the junction with a more prominent fire track.

Continue along the fire track as it undulates east along the Great Dividing Range. After about two kilometres the track climbs a little, then swings round a bend to the north-east. At the bend, leave your rucksacks behind for the climb to the Nobs. Locate the AAWT, which leaves the fire track and climbs up the slope to the south. The track is occasionally inconspicuous but climbs straight up the spur to reach the prominent northern summit of the Nobs (1495 metres). Views are restricted but the southern summit, 700 metres further away, provides an impressive vista.

Return to your rucksacks and follow the fire track north-east to a helipad, then continue very steeply north into the Clear Creek valley. Join Clear Creek Road and walk downstream a short way to the end of the walk at the camping area beside Clear Creek.

Glen von der Kniff grew up in the foothills of the Victorian Alps where from a young age he took to bushwalking and then later on cross-country skiing. While he loves travelling overseas, his real passion remains the Australian High Country.

Grade: Hard

Length: Four days

Type: Mountain scenery, outstanding views

Region: Victorian Alps (south-east of Mansfield)

Nearest Town: Mansfield

Start, finish: Clear Creek Road

Best time: Late spring/summer/autumn

Special: Area affected by bushfire in 2006/2007





Tasmania's Tarkine Rainforest Track

Take a path less travelled

If you're anything like us, a guided walk is only appealing if it offers something extraordinary. An experience of remoteness and seclusion, a genuine wilderness getaway and the opportunity to learn about and give something back to the world. To walk the Tarkine Rainforest Track in Tasmania's north west is all of this, and much more.

Like entering a landscape of goblins and faeries, the Tarkine Rainforest Track transports people into a magical world, where a vast tapestry of rich greens forms the backdrop for the full six day experience. Towering rainforest, hidden waterholes, horizontal trees, Giant Fresh Water

Crayfish and every colour of fungi imaginable all reside within this green wonderland. But best of all, we're more likely to see a Tassie Tiger than to run into other bushwalkers on this walk!

- Day 1 - Raft across the Arthur River, walk deep into the forest.
- Day 2 - Giant Eucalyptus canopy, ascend rainforest plateau to camp.
- Day 3 - Giant tree ferns, horizontal forest, Tarkine Falls base camp.
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Pigs might fly but echidnas do swim

The short-beaked echidna



Professional river guide Lez Freeman writes: 'I recently took this photo from a kayak on Lake Yarrunga in Kangaroo Valley, while taking some girls on a five-day paddling trip as part of their Duke of Edinburgh award. It was amazing seeing it swim, as it would go along with its head down for four or five metres, then raise its beak to take a breath. At the point it was crossing, the lake is around 300 metres wide, but despite having its head down and being knocked off course by my wash it made it easily across the lake by the shortest possible route, before waddling off into the bush.'

It looks like a strange piece of floating plant debris, but it's really an echidna in the water. Echidnas are generally solitary, very secretive and seldom seen, however it is not unusual for an echidna to swim across a farm dam or a freshwater stream. They have even been sighted frolicking in the surf along coastal areas. When 'rescued' by a well-meaning bystander, echidnas often simply turn around and head back into the water. Why? Streams, dams and coastal areas are all part of an echidna's home range, and echidnas are naturally curious. The spines, which are modified hairs, have a spongy pith filling making the echidna particularly buoyant in water and the beak is a perfect snorkel.

The short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) is the closest relative to the semi-aquatic platypus. These two mammals, plus the long-beaked echidna in Papua New Guinea make up an ancient group called monotremes. They are the only egg-laying mammals on earth and their ancestors go back to the time of the dinosaurs. This makes them the oldest surviving mammals in the world and they only live in the Australasian region. Platypuses are restricted to waterways in the eastern parts of Australia and Tasmania. Short-beaked echidnas, on the other hand, are known as Australia's most common native mammal. Population numbers are not great, but they are highly adaptable and have a


widespread distribution throughout the various Australian ecosystems, deserts to rainforests and coastal to above the snow line.

Their successful distribution is partially due to the availability of their varied food sources. Echidnas eat all types of invertebrates in all stages of development. Lactating females are particularly fond of the fat, juicy moth larvae found at the base of many plants in spring. Their tiny mouth only opens the width of the tongue (which can extend up to 17 centimetres), so to ingest such large prey they rupture the tough body with the beak and suck out the high fat, high protein contents...a little like a power milkshake. Other favourite foods include earthworms, grubs, ant eggs, beetle larvae as well as ants and termites.

Echidnas are different from other mammals in many ways. They are the only mammal with a true beak (it being part of the skeletal structure), their hind feet point backwards (they can dig straight down into the ground like a rotary fence post digger), they rarely make any audible sounds (we still do not know how they avoid each other in the bush) and to reproduce they lay an egg. The female does not have a true pouch, but the strong stomach muscles provide a temporary one. The egg hatches after ten days and the young, called puggle, is carried for about 50 days. It is then put in a nursery

burrow and suckled by the mother until it is seven months old. At weaning the mother simply opens the nursery and the young is on its own.

Yet another unusual echidna trait is their low and variable body temperature. They operate best at only 31°C to 33°C and can use torpor (a lowering of temperature, metabolism and respiration) at any time of the year. If forced to reach a human body temperature of 37°C they suffer heat stress and die. Echidnas cannot sweat or pant to help them cool down, so when living in hot areas they avoid the heat. They are highly intelligent animals, so maybe taking a cool summer dip in the water is another form of temperature regulation.

Due to loss of habitat, introduced predators, use of herbicides and pesticides, electric fences and road traffic, echidnas are disappearing from many of their natural ranges. You can help researchers document current populations of echidnas by reporting your sightings to the national echidna database at: echidna@kin.net.au 

Dr. Peggy Rissmiller

To submit a photo for the All Things Great and Small editorial contact editorial@wild.com.au. We will accept photos of plants or animals. Published photos will be accompanied by some history that we will source.

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Cam Walker

Karen Alexander profiles Wild's Environmentalist of the year

IT'S DARK IN EDMONDSON'S HUT ON THE Bogong High Plains and the headtorches are like searchlights, some food is on the Trangia and a good day's cross-country skiing is behind us. Some late-comers push open the door and I hear the gentle voice of Cam Walker. 'Hi all, just getting out of the cold for a moment; we'll be camping outside so don't worry about your sleeping space.'

Cam, you are always welcome!

Cam richly deserves the Environmentalist of the Year Award. He's a quiet person. He could be a stay-at-home dad, running the local walking club, contributing to the kids' school and community and renovating the house using a builder who only talks recycled. Well, he does all that. With two children, Mia and Tali, and partner Natalie, Cam earns some of his income from teaching social change and environmental politics part-time at RMIT.

But Cam is also a passionate social and environmental justice campaigner. He's worked with Friends of the Earth (FoE) since 1989. At that time FoE Melbourne was recovering from the heady anti-nuclear campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s and looking for a future. For more than 20 years Cam has worked on most FoE campaigns and in nearly all aspects of the organisation including being on the executive committee of FoE International for six years.

Cam is a 'generalist', a rare attribute these days, working on a wide range of issues such as forests, mining, toxics, urban sprawl, anti-nuclear and corporate activity. But he, better than anyone I know, has not only talked about social and environmental justice, he has integrated these two 'categories' to be one. Indigenous solidarity, workers' rights, access to resources, to justice, to decision-making power, to minimal consumption levels, for instance, are all intimately linked in his thinking and actions on any issue. They are the warp and weft of his campaigning. So an anti-mining campaign is also one about Indigenous solidarity, about access to justice, to resources, to decision-making power. The climate campaign is a climate justice campaign empowering local communities here and in low income countries.

This is also how Cam works with people, and is now the basis of the organisation in which he has played a major role. FoE Melbourne is an extraordinary organisation based on collectives, consensus, trust and cooperation, training and empowering anyone who comes in, running on the smell of an oily rag. They run a shop and co-operative, taking no funds from government. FoE Melbourne is at the cutting edge of creative, community-based campaigning, taking the time to build relationships with people, for instance, the Indigenous community, and tackling the issues that many of us have only talked about. *Chain Reaction*, FoE Australia's magazine, produced by a team that usually



Wild Environmentalist of the Year, Cam Walker (on left), receives his award from the editor of Wild, Patrick Kinsella

includes Cam, has tackled, for instance, nano technology, whether there can be technical fixes for the climate crisis, sustainable food, corporates and trade, environment and population.

Cam has also applied this philosophy in his work at the international level working with disenfranchised people in Nigeria (with FoE Nigeria working on the Shell oil fiasco), Ecuador, Colombia, Alaska (against logging ancient forests) and the Diné (Navaho) in Arizona, who are resisting their forced removal from Big Mountain, a sacred site, now 'needed' for mining. And with his big picture view of the world he sees the links between a villager in these countries with us in the high-income world.

In his gentle way he applies the pressure to us too, arguing that the 'west' has less than a third of the world's population but consumes almost 80 per cent of the resources, relying heavily on the transnational corporations to exploit low income countries for our lifestyle. He believes that local campaigns need to be linked with international NGOs in the consumer countries. 'This is when changes really start...and can deliver results not possible through national level activity,' he writes.

You might think working on these issues and seeing communities in distress at first hand could lead to despair. Cam was very

aware of this after the Black Saturday fires last year, not only for those who suffered immediate loss, but also observing his fellow climate justice workers having their worst fears confirmed as the weather patterns, consistent with the climate crisis predictions, led to yet another round of catastrophic fires.

For Cam too, with the Australian bush nurturing him since he was a kid, the losses from the fires over the last decade are severe. 'I won't see the alpine ash forests of the Buffalo Plateau in old growth stage again in my lifetime', he says.

This isn't going to stop him walking, skiing and climbing and he has just had time with Mia, Tali and Natalie exploring Lake St Clair by canoe. Somehow he also finds time to write about his special places such as Mt Bogong, Goolengook in East Gippsland, climbing on Mount Buffalo, and in Tasmania, the Du Cane Range, Mt Field, and the Franklin and Gordon Rivers, or the Daintree in Queensland along with Ecuador and even rainforests in Alaska (see www.worldreviewer.com/member/camwalker/).

Thanks Cam for all your fabulous work and for helping us see our place in nature and as part of our global community.

By joining and/or donating to FoE Melbourne you too can celebrate Wild's Environmentalist of the Year, Cam Walker at www.melbourne.foe.org.au



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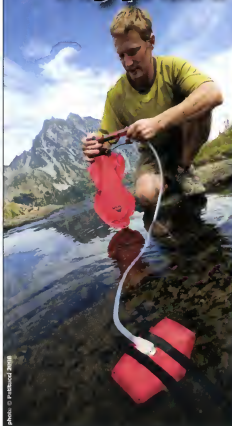


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Tassie update

Our correspondent Vica Bayley reports on the latest

Over the past few months, the Wilderness Society has been getting people into the forests to see their value for themselves. Over 2000 people visited the Upper Florentine for Tasmania's Walk Against Warming, held during the Copenhagen Climate talks. Teams of volunteers have also been visiting threatened forests all around Tasmania to measure the amount of carbon they store.

In the Upper Florentine, six plots have been surveyed. The results showed an average of 779 tonnes of carbon per hectare, with the most carbon dense plot containing 1188 tonnes of carbon per hectare. The largest tree measured contains an estimated 77 tonnes of carbon. It's important to note that these measurements were of the above-ground carbon only, and didn't take into account the massive amounts of carbon stored underground in the soil. This evidence reconfirms the value of protecting forests as part of the climate change solution.

Speaking of solutions, Tasmanians have come together to put the divisions of the past behind us, and to end the artificial contest between protecting jobs and protecting forests. It is time for a win-win solution where Tasmania protects its forests, grows jobs, develops a vibrant timber industry and creates a harmonious community.

The Wilderness Society has joined other individuals, organisations and businesses from all walks of life and of all political persuasions to create a sustainable and prosperous Tasmania, under the banner of 'Our Common Ground'.

The goals of Our Common Ground are:

- Protect Tasmania's ancient forests, rainforests and other special forests
- Shift native forest industrial timber production into existing plantations
- Build a prosperous timber industry to provide secure jobs
- Establish sustainable and socially acceptable plantation management
- Create new jobs from our protected forests
- Restore trust in our democracy

Global demand for wood and paper products from native forest is declining rapidly, with more and more consumers demanding plantation timber. This gives Tasmania the best opportunity in decades to protect the forests we all love. If you support these goals too, please go to www.ourcommonground.org.au and register to join 'Our Common Ground'.

As confirmation that solutions to long running debates are possible, recent

The front of the walk as the speakers lead the rest of the crowd through the forest. Speakers holding the front banner from left to right (not including marshalls in orange vests) are James Risbey (climatologist), Phil Harrington (renewable-energy expert) Jess Wright (Environment Tasmania), Maddie Irwin (Climate Action Hobart [age 15]), Xavier Rudd (musician) and Peter Cundall (legend).

Rob Blakers

announcements to halt logging in the Wielangta State forest and to rule out native forest use in Gunns' pulp mill point to dreams becoming realities.

Because Wielangta has been recognised as critical nesting habitat for the threatened swift parrot, logging plans have been shelved for three years while a management plan is finalised for the species. This is a testament to the hard work of scientists, politicians, conservationists and the community. Similar agreements now need to be made to spare other nesting areas such as in the forests of Bruny Island, the Tasman Peninsula and Tylers Hill from the planned logging.

The announcement that any Gunns' pulp mill would be 100 per cent based on plantations from day one was welcomed by conservation groups as a step in the right direction. The mill is still located in the wrong place, uses the wrong bleaching technology and would have unacceptable impact on local industries. Gunns and the Government have also been called on to renegotiate existing agreements to specifically rule out native forest products from all of Gunns' operations. Only then will the potential solutions and opportunities for Tasmania be available.

Protection in Sight for NSW's Red Gum Forests

Jonathan La Nauze reports on the long running battle to save the river red gum forests along the Murray River

In his final dramatic hours as NSW Premier last December, Nathan Rees announced a long-awaited resolution to the dispute over logging in the red gum forests that line the Murray and other rivers in the state's southwest. Rees said the Labor government would protect the majority of the forests in new national parks and reserves, and help the small local logging industry move out with a \$48 million assistance package. New Premier Kristina Keneally has said she is committed to the parks but will review the details, leading environmentalists to worry that anti-conservation forces in the Labor party will seek to delay and wind-back the commitment. With Forests NSW looking to open new areas for logging before the end of summer, it is crucial that the decision is implemented immediately and in full.

The red gum forests of the Riverina are habitats of international significance, home to over 65 threatened plant and animal species, including the iconic barking owl, squirrel glider, southern bell frog and superb parrot. However, these aquatic wonderlands are in crisis as logging has drastically reduced the number of ancient hollow-bearing trees, while irrigation, drought and climate change have reduced flooding from an almost annual occurrence to a rarity. It has been over a decade since the last major flood down the Murray, and thousands of hectares of red gums are now dying. Logging has turned vast areas of old growth forests into stick-farms, lacking the diversity and the habitat traditionally found on the floodplain.

In response to this crisis, the Victorian government recently protected 90 000 hectares of red gum in national parks. The forests are still thirsty and the Brumby government is dragging its heels in the national effort to restore water to the Murray, but the national parks are a crucial step forward. However, Victoria's efforts alone cannot prevent the ecological catastrophe unfolding in the Riverina. About two-thirds of Australia's red gum forests are north of the border and Victoria's conservation efforts need to be matched by the NSW government.

In late 2007, frustrated by government inaction and an increase in logging intensity the National Parks Association launched court action challenging the legality of the logging, and protestors began disrupting logging in the Millewa forest. A court agreement was reached which placed temporary restrictions on where and how logging could occur while an environmental impact assessment was conducted. Meanwhile, a Commonwealth investigation found the logging was potentially



Big old red gums on the Murray River.

Cam Walker

breaching Commonwealth law by putting at risk internationally significant Ramsar wetlands and the nationally threatened superb parrot. Environment Minister Peter Garrett requested a halt to logging while a more rigorous conservation assessment was undertaken. Forests NSW refused, however, releasing a sham impact assessment that met neither the standards of state or commonwealth environmental law, and unsurprisingly endorsed status quo logging practice.

Faced with a return to pre-court agreement logging conditions and a flagrant breach of environmental law, community members, including Yorta Yorta traditional owners, again established peaceful protest sites in the Millewa forest last June – in one instance, halting logging for ten days. Former Premier Bob Carr publicly joined the campaign for red gum national parks and finally in August, Premier Nathan Rees announced a regional forest assessment that would identify new national parks to protect threatened species and bring remaining logging operations into compliance with state and commonwealth laws.

Rees announced the outcome of the assessment on 3 December last year, creating 109 000 hectares of national parks and reserves, protecting most of the ecologically significant forests in the Riverina. The report also made an urgent call for a massive increase in the amount of water allocated to flood these forests, warning that otherwise some would die within a matter of years. Importantly, it also recognised that Indigenous people continue to enjoy strong connections to the red gum forests of the Riverina, and recommended that many of the parks be jointly managed with Traditional Owners.

Woodchips

Gunns abandons its lawsuit against the Gunns 20

On Thursday 28 January this year, Gunns agreed to abandon its case against the four environmentalists remaining in the case against the group, which was originally known as the Gunns 20. Gunns agreed to pay them \$155, 088 towards their legal costs. The defendants will give no undertakings – they have won a comprehensive victory over the woodchipping giant. The result has been widely hailed as a victory for free speech, for the right to peaceful protest and for the environment.

Good news from Keppel Island

Lyndie Malan informs us that the proposal for a massive real estate development on Lot 21 on Great Keppel Island has been rejected by Federal Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett. In making his decision Mr Garrett said: 'I've looked closely at what's being proposed for the island and considered my department's recommendation, and I've concluded that a project of this size and density would lead to unacceptable impacts on the World Heritage and National Heritage values of the area including the Great Barrier Reef.' The proposal included a 300-room hotel, 1700 resort villas, 300 apartments, a 560 Berth marina and yacht club, ferry terminal, retail village, golf course and sporting oval.


Timor Caves threatened

Stephen Bunton informs us that Timor Caves in NSW are under threat from limestone quarrying. The Upper Hunter Council has approved an application by Stoneco Pty Ltd for the extraction of 2.4 million tonnes over 30 years, from the same block of limestone as that which contains the caves. The Newcastle and Hunter Valley Speleological Society (NHVSS) has lodged an objection in the Land and Environment Court on the grounds that the Environmental Impact Statement was grossly inadequate, the development will damage the hydrology and underground ecosystems and that the vegetation communities on the surface contain threatened species.

NHVSS will be represented by the Environmental Defender's Office. This court action is a costly and it is being funded through the Australian Speleological Federation (ASF). Donations to ASF are tax-deductible and can be sent to: Timor Karst Appeal, C/- Mrs Grace Matts, 176 William St, Bankstown, NSW 2200. Further information can be obtained at www.NHVSS.org.au or www.caves.org.au

Act Now

It is crucial that the NSW government uphold its commitment to create 109 000 hectares of red gum protected areas, and follow through with delivering an additional 1200 billion litres of water to keep the forests alive. You can find out the latest news on the campaign, get involved and send a supportive email to the Premier by visiting www.redgum.org.au



Kimberley Time Bomb Ticking

Joshua Coates reports on the latest developments for the planned gas hub for James Price Point in the Kimberley

James Price Point (background) is crucial habitat for a range of species such as the humpback whale and the green turtle (foreground). Rod Hartvigsen

On 2 December Federal Resources Minister Martin Ferguson threatened Browse Gas joint venture partners (Shell, Chevron, BP, BHP and Woodside) that they would lose their gas leases if they did not accept his two-stage decision deadline – leading to the construction of a massive liquid natural gas (LNG) processing hub on the Kimberley coast near Broome. He has given the joint venture partners 120 days to make up their minds, meaning a decision will be needed by 2 April this year. Woodside wants the James Price Point facility, which is twice as financially favourable for it, but Shell and BHP prefer a

brownfield tie-back to the North-West Shelf plant at Karratha that would better protect the venture against a decline in gas production expected by about 2020.

A proposal for a facility on the Kimberley coast at James Price Point to process offshore Browse Basin LNG will have devastating impacts on the pristine Kimberley environment. The proposal also represents the thin end of the wedge, opening the door for the industrialisation of the Kimberley by damaging industry such as strip mining around the Mitchell Plateau, coal and uranium mining.

The Kimberley coast is too special, too important and too sensitive to put at risk. There are viable alternatives that would have less impact on the environment. The Kimberley could have a bright future with sustainable jobs – including Indigenous jobs – in tourism, well-managed fisheries and land management.

Learn more and take action!

Visit www.wilderness.org.au/timebomb to send a message to the Government and companies opposing the industrial development.

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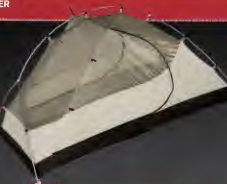


CAPACITY : 1 PERSON PACKED WEIGHT : 1.59 KG MINIMUM WEIGHT : 1.47 KG FOOTPRINT WEIGHT : 170 GMS FLOOR AREA : 1.74M²

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*MINIMUM WEIGHT INCLUDES INNER, FLY, POLES AND 2 X PEGS ONLY.

Beasts of Burden

Mathew Farrell surveys the latest packs for bushwalking

THE PACK HAS SEEN MANY REVISIONS through the years: no frame, external frame, internal frame, sprung and torsioned frame. Despite all this, it fundamentally remains a simple sack that we strap to our backs. While I am a fan of travelling lightly – shedding unneeded items and weight to ease the burden – there is an alarming trend for more complicated, fragile and disposable ‘stuff’ these days, packs amongst them. In my book, when it comes to a pack, pockets, zips, bells and whistles should be the first things to go, rather than strength. I have bought featherweight packs for particular trips, but by and large my simple and sturdy bushwalking pack remains one of my most dependable and long-serving pieces of kit.

This review assumes that you are looking for a pack that will serve you well for self-supported bushwalking in Australia and New Zealand. Even if you intend to go other places and do other things, such a pack is one of the most versatile pieces of gear you can own. Our bushwalking conditions place high demands on outdoor equipment, and it shows in the packs designed specifically for this region, which are built to withstand rugged off-track conditions, whereas European/North American packs are often designed for trail walking.

Choosing a pack

The fit of a pack is paramount. There is little point in buying a pack if it doesn't fit correctly. A good indication of a well-fitting pack is that it doesn't feel vastly different on your back when loaded or unloaded with weight. This may sound trite, but by comparison when wearing an ill-fitting pack, you are much more aware of every kilogram. Many manufacturers use the same or similar harnesses throughout their range. Find the harness/brand that fits you, and select a pack from there. See the box 'How to fit a pack' for help with determining the correct harness.

Best suited for

Typically, 60 litres is the smallest pack you can get away with for self-supported multiday bushwalks in Australia and New Zealand, with something like 70 litres being the norm. If you are uncertain about what volume you need, take a bag of gear to the shop and do a trial pack, or use some of their stock – a good shop won't mind (be sensitive to busy times like weekends). Allow a little extra space for food.

As a guide, the table summarises the pack's volume (based on the medium size): weekend packs (W; smaller than 70 litres), up to five-day adventures (E; 70–85 litres) and extended walks beyond five days (E+; greater than 85 litres).



A pack can let you explore some amazing places. Looking out over the Fox Glacier in the Westland National Park, New Zealand. Grant Dixon

Rucksacks

		Best suited for	Volume, litres	Weight, grams	Back lengths available	Main material	Internal compartments	Harness	Durability	Water resistance	Value	Comments	Approx price, \$
Aarn Vietnam www.aarnpacks.com													
Guiding Light	W	55-60	1600	S, L	S	1	••	•••	••••	•••	•••	Crampon patch, fully articulated harness; ice axe loops; minimalist padding; removable internal front to rear divider; roll-top closure; stretch side pockets; waterproof liner supplied	330
Natural Balance	W	60-85 (+12)	1900	S, L	S	2	••	••	••••	••	••	Bungee cords; crampon patch; fully articulated harness; ice axe loops; removable shoulder strap pockets; removable internal front to rear divider; roll-top closure on both compartments; stretch side pockets; waterproof liner built in	480
Load Limo	E	70-75 (+18)	1750	S, L	S	1	••	•••	••••	••	••	Crampon patch; fully articulated harness; ice axe loops; removable internal front to rear divider; removable lid; removable shoulder strap pockets; roll-top closure; stretch side pockets	580
Black Wolf China www.blackwolf.com.au													
Mountain Ash	WE	45-85	2100	S-L	S	2	••	••	••	•••	•••	Rain cover; whistle; ice axe loops, one size adjustable with packs in ten litre volume increments from 45 to 85 litre	195
McKinley *	W	55-85	2580	S, M, L, XL	S	2	••	••	••	••	••	Expanding side pockets; front panel opens; rain cover	265
Bugaboo *	E	70-80	2250	S, L	S	2	••	••	••	••	••	Expanding side pockets and lid; rain cover	310
Dexter Vietnam www.dexter.com													
Air Contact 65+10	E	65-85 (+10)	2800	W, S-L	S	2	•	•	•	•	•	Drink bottle pocket; pocket on hip-belt; removable lid; SL models are women's fit; two external side hydration bladder pockets	400
Kathmandu Vietnam www.kathmandu.com.au													
Archon	W	65	1500	S-L	S	1	•	•	••	••	••	Hydration bladder pocket; internal mesh pocket; no external pockets—very simple entry level pack; removable hip belt	240
Vardo	E	70-75	2080	S-L	S	2	••	••	••	•	•	Base, side and top internal compression straps; removable front pocket; removable lid	530
Low Alpine Vietnam www.lowalpine.com													
TFX Horizon *	W	55-65	2200	WM, WL, M, L	S	2	••	••	••	••	••	Daisy chains; hydration pocket; ice axe loop; large side pockets; rain cover	350
Cerro Torre *	E	65-95	2890	W, M, L	S	2	••	••	••	••	••	Bungee straps; hydration pocket; internal organisation/compression straps; rain cover	400
TFX Wilderness	E	65 (+15)	3000	W, M	S	2	••	••	•	•	•	Daisy chains; front entry zip; helmet recess; hydration bladder pocket; ice axe loops; rain cover; removable lid; water bottle pockets	430
Macpac Philippines www.mispac.co.nz													
Torlesse	E	70-80	2850	S-L	S	2	••	••	••	••	••	50- and 65-litre versions available; daisy chains; hydration bladder pocket; front pocket; ice axe loops; water bottle pockets; front access in the 65 litre and upwards models	400
Glissade	E	70-75	3050	W, M, L	C	2	••••	••••	•••	••	••	Ice axe loops; large front pocket; ski slots	460
Cascade 75 FL	E	75-85	3150	S, M, L	C	2	•••	•••	•••	••	••	Bungee straps; hip-belt pocket; hydration bladder pocket; ice axe loops; women's size called Esprit available in 55- and 65-litre options	600
Mont Vietnam www.mont.com.au													
Pioneer	E+	80-85	2700	M, L	C	1	••••	••••	•••	••	••	Daisy chain on lid; drink bottle pouches; ice axe loop; large zip front pocket (easy access)	480
Backcountry	E	70-85	2850	W, M, L	C	2	••••	••••	•••	••	••	Drink bottle pouches; ice axe loop; large zip front pocket (easy access)	500
Alpha	E	70-85	2500	W, M, L	S	2	••••	••••	•••	••	••	As above	500
Mountain Designs Vietnam www.mountaindesigns.com													
Tellus	W	60-70	2200	S-L	S	2	••	••	••	••	••	Daisy chains; front zip pocket; hydration bladder pocket; stretch side pockets	250
Edge	W	60-70	2400	S-L	S	2	••	••	••	••	••	Crampon patch and slot; ice axe loops; stretch side pockets	380
North Face China www.thenorthface.com													
Primero	E	60-85	2270	S-L	S	2	••	••	••	•	•	60-litre version only has one internal compartment; front and side stretch pockets; harness; back a moulded rubber; ice axe loops; removable lid; helmet recess; whistle; water-resistant zip on top; welded seals top and bottom	550
One Planet Australia www.oneplanet.com.au													
WBA *	W	55-65	2100	WS, WM, M, L	C	2	•••	•••	••	••	••	Back length adjustable while wearing pack, very light and simple: standard lid pockets and no more	360
Styx *	E	65-75	2700	WS, WM, M, L	C	2	••••	••••	•••	••	••	Back length adjustable while wearing pack, easy access front pocket; full size drink bottle pockets; slim profile	460
McMillan	E+	80-90	3000	WS, WM, M, L	C	1	••••	••••	•••	••	••	Back length adjustable while wearing pack; full size drink bottle pockets; large zip front pocket; ski slots	540

Rucksacks continued

	Best suited for	Volume, litres	Weight, grams	Back lengths available	Main material	Internal compartments	Harness	Durability	Water resistance	Value	Comments	Approx price, \$
Osprey Vietnam www.osprey.com												
Aether	E	55-85	2150	WM, WL, S, M, L	S	2	••	•	•	•	55- and 60-litre versions only have one internal compartment; front and side stretch pockets; hydration bladder pocket; ice axe loops; mouldable harness; removable lid; whistle; women's model called Ariel	350-400
Argon	E+	70-110	2860	WM, WL, S, M, L	S	2	••	•	•	•	Front and side stretch pockets; front zip pocket; hydration bladder pocket; lid converts to bumbag; mouldable harness; women's model called Xenon	540-600
Osprey China www.osprey.com.au												
Ottal Sirocco	W	50	2300	S-L	S	2	•	•	•	•••	Daisy chains, ice axe loops, rain cover, sized for women/young people, water bottle pockets	120
Outer Limits Highland*	E	70	2500	S-L	S	2	•	•	•	•••	Bungy cord on lid, crampon patch; rain cover; water bottle pockets	120
Tatonka Vietnam www.tatonka.com												
Bison 75	E	60-70	3400	M, L	S	2	•	•	•	•	Front entry zip; front zip pocket; ice axe loop, side pockets, bungy strap on lid; daisy chain	400
Yukon 70	E	50-70	3020	S-L	S	2	•	•	•	•	Front zip pocket; ice axe loop, side pocket, internal compression straps, rain cover	290
Vango China www.vango.com.au												
Sherpa	W	70-80	2200	M, L	S	2	•	•	•	•••	Bungy cord; front zip pocket; hydration pocket; ice axe loop; rain cover, two side expansion pockets with zips	120
Explorer	W	70-80	1950	M, L	S	2	•	•	•	••	Bungy cord, daisy chain, ice axe loops; two side expansion pockets with zips; two smaller side pockets	140
Wilderness Equipment Vietnam www.wildernessequipment.com.au												
Breakout	E	70-75	2800	M, L	C	1	••••	••••	•••	••••	Swivel attached hip-belt, front buckle pocket	300
Kanjum*	E+	85-95	3350	S, M, L	C	1	••••	••••	•••	••	Swivel attached hip-belt; lumbar lid	490
Frayconet	E	70-80	3350	S, M, L	C	2	••••	••••	••	••	As above	500

• poor •• average ••• good •••• excellent **Design/shape:** Dome with entrance on long side, **SP** single pole, Tunnel with entrance on short side, **TD** dome with crossing poles, entrance on short side, **TS** tunnel with entrance on long side **Number of poles:** number of full length, ground-to-ground poles; number after + is shorter, non-load bearing poles, **Hub** design with all poles interconnected **Number of vestibules:** Optional vestibules available **Fly material:** Nylon, Polyester, PA polyamide, Single skin fabric, **SN** siliconised nylon, **SP** siliconised polyester * weight and cost of trekking poles needed is not included **ns** not specified **na** not applicable **n** not seen by referee The **country** listed after the brand name is the country in which the products are designed

Volume

Volumes were supplied by manufacturers, whose methods of measure can differ widely – pay attention to the size and shape. The volume of a given model usually varies by about five litres with each size. Five litres one way or the other shouldn't matter, though if there is an overlap between sizes, you may get a choice.

Where a manufacturer lists a secondary number (for example '4+10'), it refers to an expanding throat (extendable lid), or front or side pockets. Aarn packs feature large (removable) pockets that attach to the shoulder straps, the theory being that this distributes the pack's weight between the wearer's back and front. Their secondary number refers to this volume.

Weight

Again, this is supplied by the manufacturer. Where possible, the weight of the medium size pack has been given, though many manufacturers only publish weights for their smallest size.

Back lengths available

All packs reviewed have adjustable back lengths, and most come in a range of sizes. Generally the cheaper packs have simpler harnesses and come in one size, with the option of different back lengths increasing

as you move up models. A W-prefix denotes a women's size. Sizing is unique to each manufacturer. The back length is adjusted with straps (usually under the lumbar pad), which change the length between shoulder straps and hip-belt. One Planet is unique in having these straps mounted on the hip-belt, which means they can be adjusted while you are wearing the pack. The straps can also adjust the length of each side individually – handy for uneven shoulders.

Aarn harnesses are also unique. Their hip-belts and shoulder straps are not rigidly attached to the pack. Rather, they slide through their fittings, allowing the wearer to twist or lean side to side without the pack following.

Main Material

The fabric and how a pack is constructed have a large bearing on its durability, water resistance and weight. Synthetics (nylon and polyester) make the lightest packs, but are less durable than canvas. Synthetics, particularly when polyurethane coated (PU) or siliconised (SI) can be more water-resistant than canvas (cotton and polyester yarns impregnated with resins) when new, but are more susceptible to wear, particularly at the seams. Typically, Australian and New Zealand packs are canvas and of simpler construction – which helps to keep their weight down. American and

European packs use thinner fabrics and more complicated construction. They are lighter, but less durable and water-resistant.

Most synthetic fabrics used today have strong ripstop threads running through them in a grid. If the fabric is torn, a tear should stop at the stronger threads. Canvas does not tend to run when torn, so ripstop is not common when this material is used.

Synthetics are rated in denier (grams per 1000 metres). A higher number indicates a denser weave, thus a stronger and heavier fabric. Canvas is measured in 'grams per square metre' or 'ounces per square yard'.

Many manufacturers list proprietary names for fabrics. These are all some variant of nylon, polyester or canvas. Cordura is highly abrasion

Left, the Lowe Alpine TFX Wilderness ND65+15. Right, the Lowe Alpine TFX Horizon 65.



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Kayak Africa Roadshow

CATCH ADVENTURER BEAU MILES as he presents a newly remastered film about his attempt to paddle around the Horn of Africa from the eastern intersection of the Tropic of Capricorn to its western antipode.

Presented by *Outer Edge* and *Wild* magazines, the events will be attended by Beau and will include a performance by Aussie band The Animators.

Melbourne: Thornbury Theatre Saturday 15 May, 7pm thethornburytheatre.com
Sydney: National Maritime Museum Friday 21 May, 7pm, anim.gov.au
Brisbane: Powerhouse/Viety Theatre wed 26 May, 7pm brisbanepowerhouse.org
 (Tickets at the door: \$20-25)



resistant nylon used on the base of most packs, be they synthetic or canvas. When assessing a pack, you should be able to judge a material by likening it to similar appearing fabrics.

The table lists the main fabric of the pack body (not the base or harness).

Internal compartments

A dual compartment pack will have an internal divider that can be undone if desired, plus a second, lower entry (nearly always accessible through a zip). The two different compartments and entry points make organising gear easier, though the lower entry is a water ingress point and both zips are possible failure points. Two smaller pack liners may be needed too. By contrast, a single compartment pack is simpler, more water-resistant and robust, but makes organisation harder.

The shape of a pack – and how it is packed – influences your comfort and fatigue. A top-heavy pack requires more effort from the wearer to keep it upright. A pack with the weight too far back will tip the wearer backwards. Heavy items should be packed close to the back and halfway down. Many American packs are slim and tall, but can be top-heavy. Designed for open terrain, they are more likely to interfere with the wearer's head, especially if wearing a helmet (some packs have a moulded recess for clearance). An Antipodean trait is for more wombat-shaped packs – short and squat. They extend further

out to the sides and behind the wearer but are not so tall and do not interfere with one's head so much. They are less likely to hit overhanging branches, but more likely to scrape on the sides. Neither style circumvents having to pack well in the first place.

Double-compartment packs, as well as packs with internal pockets and dividers can make it easier to keep a load in the right place, though once again diligent packing can negate the need for such compartments.

Harness

Harnesses that are overly complicated or flimsy impact the durability and quality of a pack. Simpler and sturdier harnesses rated higher. Note: this column is not a review of comfort, as this is a purely subjective measure.

Durability

More complex packs were rated down on durability and water resistance. Higher denier/denser fabrics scored higher in these categories. Where two packs were otherwise the same, single compartment packs were rated one point higher for both durability and water-resistance.

Water resistance

Like durability, fabric type and construction were key considerations. Packs that were rated high on durability also tended to get a high water resistance rating. The biggest



From far left to right,
The Osprey's Argon 85.
The Black Wolf to Bugaboo.
The Osprey's Exos 58.
The Vango Explorer 65+10.

divergence from the durability rating came when packs were soundly constructed with waterproof synthetic fabrics not as tough as a comparable pack in canvas, but more water resistant.

Value

Harness, durability and water resistance were equally weighed against price.

Comments

Certain features make attaching toys such as climbing gear, skis and tools easier and should be considered if these are primary uses for your pack. However, do not underestimate how much you can strap on most standard packs. An extra webbing strap or accessory cord can do amazing things. Be discerning in deciding what features make a pack more useful to you, and those that unnecessarily complicate and weaken a pack. Water can be carried anywhere, but some form of water bottle or hydration bladder pockets make drinking on the go much easier.

To carry skis, slide them under the compression straps down each side of the pack and lash the tips together. Ice axe loops are the best way to carry ice tools, but are also excellent for carrying walking poles and camera tripods. Crossed bungee cord on the front of a pack is handy for quick access clothing or tools such as

snow-shovels, but stow them well – a dropped jumper isn't very funny when it turns cold.

Rain covers are effectively shower-caps that stretch over a pack. They shouldn't be a replacement for pack liners, but another point of defence. They are available separately, although they don't always stand up well to heavy scrub.

Removable lids lighten a pack, and make it easier to over-load them. I don't rate this as overly important, though two packs surveyed have removable lids that convert to bumbags—useful for small side trips where the weight and size of your full pack isn't necessary.

Gadgets that don't detract from a pack are whistles moulded into chest buckles (one less thing to carry in the lid pocket, reachable if you fall).

Price

Ideally a pack will be a decades-long investment – try not to shop on price. 🚫

Mathew Farrell has been running off to the hills whenever possible for many years, usually with too much camera equipment. Mathew also has years of experience fitting people out with packs and other gear.

This survey was refereed by Zac Zaharias.

How to fit a pack

For a pack to fit well, its harness should conform to your back without any significant gaps or sore points.

Loosen all the adjustment straps and shoulder the pack. Fasten the hip-belt and tighten the straps so the top of the hip-belt sits just above the widest part of your hips (not your waist). Except for falling over backwards, the pack should now be supported on your hips. Now cinch the shoulder straps down until they just start to add weight to your shoulders. The majority of the pack's weight should still be on your hips. Now fasten the sternum strap and slide it to the middle of your chest, or wherever it feels most comfortable (women may need to slide the strap further up). The strap need not be done up tighter – all it is doing is positioning the shoulder straps properly on your shoulders.

Look at your profile in a mirror, or get a friend to help you – you are looking to see if the shoulder straps conform over your shoulders and down your back. If there is a gap, loosen off the shoulder straps, take off the pack and shorten the back-length slightly. Put the pack back on and go through the fitting procedure again. If the shoulder straps connect with the pack level with or below the bottom of your shoulder blades, the back length is too short. There won't be enough padded shoulder strap in front of your torso, and the top of the pack will be unstable.

After the back length is correctly adjusted, cinch down the straps at the sides of the hip-belt and on top of the shoulders. These straps stabilise the pack by pulling it closer to your body.

One obvious point of difference between different harnesses will be the lumbar pad. You need to run with a brand that conforms to the curvature of your back. If you are particularly long- or short-waisted, you might be confined to one or two brands. Depending on your hips and waist, you need a different size or shape hip-belt. Some hip-belts are interchangeable with different sizes.

Some manufacturers offer women's sizes. In some cases, this is simply another label for the 'small' size, but some women's packs do have specific design features, such as a differently shaped hip-belt, or a different contour on the shoulder straps. Just as when selecting boots, do not dismiss a model because it is labelled 'women's' or 'men's' (unless it is hot pink and festooned with hibiscus flowers) – find out which is the best fit for you.

If you are relatively happy with the feel of a harness, load some weight in the pack and go for a walk around the shop. Ideally the pack will move with you, and not sway excessively from side to side. It won't rub or press anywhere in particular.

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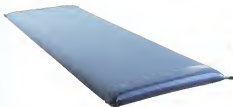
The scoop-and-go filtration system

The **Lifesaver Systems' Lifesaver water filtration bottle** is said to be the world's first all-in-one 'ultra-filtration water bottle', removing all sorts of nasties that could have you running to the loo: bacteria, viruses, parasites, cysts and fungi. The bottle is easy to use: simply scoop up some water, give it a few pumps, lock down the pump then open up the drinking valve—hey presto! The Lifesaver also comes with an activated carbon filter that reduces a wide range of chemical compounds and heavy metals, as well as eliminating bad tastes and odours. The initial flow rate for the bottle is 2.5 litres a minute, although, as the filter gets more use, the rate steadily decreases. You know it's time to change filter cartridges over due to the 'Failsafe' technology, which shuts the filter down when it comes to the end of its life, preventing any further water getting through.

The filter comes in two models, the 4000UF or 6000UF, which have a service rating of up to 4000 litres and 6000 litres of water respectively—although only the 4000UF is currently available in Australia.

The bottle holds 750 millilitres of water and weighs 635 grams dry. The Lifesaver retails for \$255, while replacement filter cartridges are \$190.

To find out more visit www.lifesaverbottlesaus.com



The contours of Luxury

If you are getting old and soft or, alternatively, you just like a good night's sleep, the new Therm-a-Rest **Luxury Map** self-inflating sleeping mat could be for you. While not suited to lightweight walking, the digital pressure mapping technology used to design this mat—combined with a luxurious thickness rating of 7.6 centimetres—will ensure that you sleep easy at base camp. The foam inside the mat is selectively die-cut in high-pressure areas while full density foam is left in low-pressure areas, leaving support where it is needed. The Luxury Map is also a very warm mat, with an R-Value of 6.8. It comes in three sizes: Regular (51 centimetres x 183 centimetres) RRP\$229.95, Large (63 centimetres x 196 centimetres) RRP\$294.95 and Extra Large (76 centimetres x 196 centimetres) RRP\$339.95. Contact Splean on 1800 634 853 to find out more.



Putting the Brakes on Shakes

Tamron have added to their stable of lenses for DX-format digital SLRs, with the **SP AF 17-50 millimetre F/2.8 XR Di II VC**. This extremely fast zoom lens has been improved with the addition of Tamron's state-of-the-art **Vibration Control (VC)**. The speed of the lens combined with the Vibration Control provides impressive sharpness, even when shooting in low light conditions with slow shutter speeds. The 17-50 millimetre focal length is the full-frame equivalent to 26-78 millimetres, a very popular zoom range. The lens is compatible with both Nikon and Canon camera systems and retails for \$995. To find out more visit www.maxwell.com.au/tamron

Magic for your back

Kiwi based company, **Aarn Design**, has added a new **pack** to its unique range. The **Magic Mountain**, part of their Ultra-Light Series, features Aarn's patented front balance pockets, which distribute weight evenly between the carrier's front and back. The Magic Mountain comes in two sizes, both with adjustable back lengths: the 44-litre model (balance pocket 12 litres / main pack

32 litres / weight 1.45 kilograms) and the 55-litre model (balance pocket 18 litres / main pack 37 litres / weight 1.49 kilograms). Aarn packs are claimed to be the only truly 100 per cent waterproof packs on the market, due to a dry liner built into the inside of every pack (both main compartment and balance pocket)—most other packs are only waterproof if they remain upright. Both sizes retail for \$299, you can find out more at www.wildside.com.au

Red Alert



MyRedFlare's **Sarwatch** system is a website that allows adventurers to leave a written description of where they are going, with an automated system to deliver that information should they fail to return. The system, which is free for all web-based use (it also has an SMS text messaging feature, which comes with a charge), basically allows you to set up an account, into which you can enter your route plan along with all the other information that is useful for rescuers: trusted contacts, transport details, companions and the like. You nominate an 'Alert Time', which is the latest time by which you expect to return. On returning safely you simply disarm the alert, but if you don't return on time, messages are sent to your 'trusted contacts' along with details of your trip. Your trusted contacts can then notify the relevant authorities with the information in their possession. To find out more about the system, visit www.myredflare.com



Night Strider

Black Diamond has released a new headtorch for those who like to run at night—perfect for those who have to train after work in winter, adventure racers or rogainers. The **Sprinter** has a powerful oval beam created by a regulated **DoublePower LED** (68 lumens power), which is powered by a lithium polymer rechargeable battery that lasts for 64 hours at maximum power. It is designed with a low profile (to stop annoying bouncing when you run and includes some neat features, like the red tail light for visibility in urban areas or when you are following someone through the bush at night. Like most headtorches these days, it offers several dimming settings and a strobe function. The Sprinter retails for \$94.95. Contact Sea to Summit on (08) 9221 6617 to find out more.

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From the Billy

Lorraine Amor provides us with a two-course winter meal

Those cold nights in the mountains can be lots of fun with winter warmers like these recipes on the menu, no wonder the family always wants to go walking!

Spaghetti Bolognese

Feeds: three

Cooking time: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1/4 of a green capsicum
- 250 g textured vegetable protein (available from health food stores)
- 2 sachets tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon Promite or Vegemite
- 1 tablespoon dried basil
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 3 tablespoons parmesan cheese
- 1 cup water

Method

Dice capsicum, then put capsicum, both sachets of tomato paste, herbs, Promite, textured vegetable protein (TVP) and cup of water into a pot. Simmer until TVP has hydrated and sauce is a nice and thick consistency. Add more water if necessary. Put sauce aside. Cook spaghetti, then drain water from pot, add sauce and warm for moment. Serve with a sprinkle of parmesan cheese.

Dutch Apples and Custard

Feeds: three for dessert

Ingredients:

- 1 packet dried apples
- 1 tablespoon mixed spice
- 1 packet Foster Clarke Quick custard mix
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 cups boiling water

Method

Soak apples for ten minutes in boiling water. Mix custard powder, sugar and one cup of water until smooth. Drain water off apples when soft and hydrated, sprinkle with mixed spice once in bowls, top with custard and go for it. Treat yourself to a hot chocolate or perhaps a nip of Muscat from a hip flask.

Wild welcomes readers' contributions to this section. Send them to editorial@wild.com.au.

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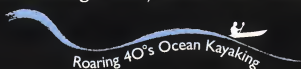


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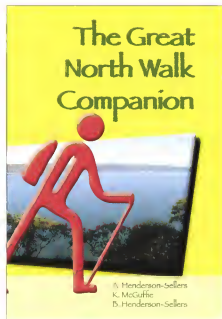


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The Great North Walk Companion

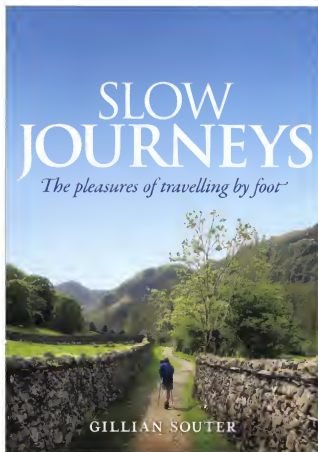
BY A. HENDERSON-SELLERS,
K. MCGUFFIE AND B. HENDERSON-SELLERS
(MYNHED, 2009,
\$27.50, www.digitprintaustralia.com)

The Great North Walk Companion is not what the title suggests. Rather than a simple reference book, it describes a fictional trip along the length of the 250-kilometre walk from Sydney to Newcastle, which is interwoven with factual local histories. 'Billie' leads her young niece 'companion' on a series of walks that reveal the companion's family history as it relates to the area's real history. It is well researched, offers many interesting stories and marks attractions such as Indigenous engravings. Walkers may find it difficult to locate the chapter that relates to the walk leg of interest. A bonus is the dedicated website with accommodation options, track conditions, geocaching coordinates and a discussion forum that is already being used. *Andrew Cox*

Slow Journeys

BY GILLIAN SOUTER (ALLEN & UNWIN,
2009, \$27.99, www.allenandunwin.com)

Slow Journeys: the pleasures of travelling by foot is an enjoyable and practical guide to overnight walking. It covers everything from trip planning, gear, weather and safety, to more obscure, but entertaining tips on stargazing, landscape drawing and 'cloudspotting'. The emphasis is on more leisurely walking – think of jaunts between French gîte d'étapes or Corsican mountain refuges, where most nights there's someone to cook you a hearty meal and supply a decent bottle of red. For those who like to carry their own food, tent and stove, it's still an interesting read with many amusing walking anecdotes mixed in with historical offerings from various writers, poets, philosophers and naturalists who've all enjoyed a good walk over the ages. You'll improve your walking synonyms (rambling,



wayfaring, perambulating) and there's some satisfying topten lists (centre-based walking, long distance walks, cultural and historical walks and 'to do' walks). All in all, it is a well-executed, informative and entertaining guide to the pleasures of slower journeys. *Hugh de Kretser*

40 Great Walks in Australia

BY TYRONE THOMAS AND ANDREW CLOSE
(EXPLORE AUSTRALIA, 2009,
\$32.95, www.exploreaustralia.net.au)

This guide is a bit of a mixed bag of lollies – the experienced authors have selected, from the hundreds of excellent Australian walks on offer, 40 great ones for your walking enjoyment. Most are day walks, ranging from two to eight hours, but there's a handful of two-day walks thrown in as well (those seeking a longer distance walking guide should look elsewhere). There's a lot to like about the guide; the maps and photos are excellent, each walk has a gradient profile and the summary information is logical and helpful. The track notes themselves are sensible and smattered with observations on nature and suggestions for good lunch spots and viewpoints. There's also some overview information on geology and flora and fauna and even a basic road atlas. The section on safety, equipment and food could do with an update (it recommends taking jeans, a canvas water bag and brown rice) but otherwise this is a good guide for those looking for a mix of well-known and more obscure one and two day Australian walks. *HdK*

Earth

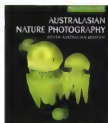
BY BOB BROWN (BOB BROWN, 2009,
\$19.95, www.bobbrown.org.au)

Earth is almost what you would call a picture book, accompanied by a short and poetic exploration of our relationship with the planet we call home. It is illustrated throughout by Bob's photos, most of which are shot in his home state, Tasmania. The message is quite simple and timeless – one of responsibility and equity – and somewhat surprisingly, is full of hope. Bob's photos are really beautiful and capture the magic of Tasmania. The book is published on a matte paper, which looks recycled, but despite this the photos reproduce well and have real warmth. *Ross Taylor*

Australasian Nature Photography ANZANG Sixth Collection

(CSIRO, 2009,
\$39.95, www.publish.csiro.au)


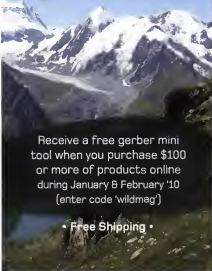
The images in this book are breathtaking and fascinating, a tribute to both photographers and nature. Many depict moments in nature that most of us will never witness; one can't help but envy the photographers. As always, the photos are of high quality and while digital cameras by far dominate, it is pleasing to see film cameras still being used. The colours, patterns and forms of the animals, plants and landscapes depicted truly do make one appreciate how wonderful nature can be and will no doubt encourage us all to get out there are experience it for ourselves. *Michele Kohout*



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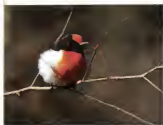


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WHERE TO SEE BIRDS IN VICTORIA



Illustrated by Tim Dolby,
 Penny Johns and Sally Symonds

Birds Australia
 A Division of the Australian Government

Where to See Birds in Victoria

EDITED BY TIM DOLBY, PENNY JOHNS AND
 SALLY SYMONDS (JACANA, 2009,
 \$35, www.allenandunwin.com)

In the potluck game of birdwatching, this book is a welcome find. Compiled by experts, it lists over 40 prime Victorian areas for finding birds. Full-colour maps break up the state into easily identifiable bio-regions. The accommodation and direction sections are a bonus. The photography is very high quality, while the bird finding guide caters for the more experienced. A guide to inner Melbourne areas will suit those who can't travel far.

Combined with a comprehensive field guide, this handy little book will make life a little easier in the often slow and patient art of twitching. Sam Morley

Walks, Tracks & Trails of Victoria

BY DERRICK STONE (CSIRO PUBLISHING, 2009,
 \$44.95, www.publish.csiro.au)

Throw this guidebook in the glovebox of your car and you'll never be short of ideas for exploring Victoria, be it by bike, foot or car. The book includes notes on an unusual mix of tracks, ranging from ten minute strolls around historic country towns to a three-day hike in Wilson's Prom; from a day-drive through the Grampians National Park to the Murray to the Mountains rail track for bike riders. If you're looking for in-depth detail about your chosen pastime (be it walking, driving or cycling) this is not the book for you. Rather, the guide's eclectic mix offers a range of options you might not have thought of, or perhaps didn't know about. I took a while to find my way around the book, perhaps due to the lack of a state map showing each track's location and an index page that could be more helpful. Quirky tidbits are included about the history of some tracks, and a map and good-quality photos accompany each one too. If you don't object to the hefty price tag and if your weekend or holiday itinerary is open, take this along for the ride and get ready for some spontaneity – you never know what you'll end up doing. Bron Willis



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Mark Watson

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